RESTITUTION

BY

ANNE BEALE

RESTITUTION.

VOL. I.

NEW AND POPULAR NOVELS

AT ALL THE LIBRARIES

DORINDA. By THE COUNTESS OF MUNSTER. 3 vols.

MISTRESS BEATRICE COPE, or PASSAGES IN THE LIFE OF A JACOBITE'S DAUGHTER. By M. E. LE CLERC. 2 vols.

THROUGH THE LONG NIGHT. By MRS. E. LYNN LINTON, author of 'Patricia Kemball,' 'Paston Carew,' &c. 3 vols.

THE TRACK OF THE STORM. By DORA RUSSELL, author of 'Footprints in the Snow,' 'The Broken Seal,' &c. 3 vols.

HUGH ERRINGTON. By GERTRUDE FORDE, author of 'Driven before the Storm,' 'Only a Coral Girl,' &c. 3 vols.

HURST & BLACKETT, 13, GREAT MARLBOROUGH STREET.

RESTITUTION

BY

ANNE BEALE

AUTHOR OF

'FAY ARLINGTON,' 'THE PENNANT FAMILY,'
'SQUIRE LISLE'S BEQUEST,' ETC.

'Fortune, men say, doth give too much to many;
But yet she never gave enough to any.'

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:
HURST AND BLACKETT, LIMITED,
13, GREAT MARLBOROUGH STREET.
1889.
All Rights Reserved.

CONTENTS

OF

THE FIRST VOLUME.

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	A Millionaire's Family	1
II.	His Three Wives	17
III.	Fan	31
IV.	The Gipsies	49
V.	The Old Ladies	62
VI.	A Jack of all Trades	79
VII.	His Daughter's Education	94
VIII.	A Good Girl	111
IX.	An Assault Frustrated	127
X.	A First Parting	143
XI.	School	160
XII.	Bruce's Tutor	173
XIII.	Une Petite Partie Carrée	190
XIV.	Edith's Schooling	209
XV.	At the Encampment	226
XVI.	The Gipsies at School	245
XVII.	A Ship Lost	260
XVIII.	'A Ruined Man'	279
XIX.	Janet at Last	296

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2025

https://archive.org/details/restitution00beal

RESTITUTION.

CHAPTER I.

A MILLIONAIRE'S FAMILY.

Mr. Aspenel, of Aspenel Park, was a millionaire. He did not himself know how many millions he possessed, but he did know that he kept one of them floating in the Bank of England for chance monetary exigencies, and the others shut up in mines, and let loose in argosies in South America and elsewhere. He had accumulated all this wealth himself, was the founder of his own fortune—as people say—and, if winning the heart's desire secures happiness, he was a happy man. He had schemed all

his life to acquire money, and he had heaped up so much that he did not know what to do with it, where to invest it, or how to spend it. Spending it was out of the question, for, having made it, he willed to keep it. He had gambled on the Stock Exchange, in railways, in foreign speculations at home and abroad, and he seized his gains with such a deadly grip that no man could wrest them from him.

Nevertheless he loved pomp and show and grand company, and, before all, the upper ten. He even gave, occasionally, large sums in public charity, and had his name blazoned forth before the public, if not as a philanthropist, at least as a benefactor of his species. He stood tolerably well with the outer world that did not understand him, but not quite so well with the members of his home circle who did. They were terribly afraid of him, and avoided him whensoever they could. As he went almost daily to London, they did

not often come into collision, and no sooner did he drive off from his house to the station than his domestics, at least, let loose the reins of their tongues and tempers. As to his wife and children——But they require a special introduction.

Aspenel Park and the magnificent mansion in its midst were as bright and beautiful as any of the bright and beautiful places in that garden of England, Kent. But its mistress was not so happy as she might have been, in spite of the green glades, umbrageous trees, swan-crested lake, and model farm by which she was surrounded. Neither did the fact that it had once belonged to an out-at-elbows nobleman comfort her as it did her husband. She was herself a scion of the aristocracy, and we rarely care overmuch for the things to which we have been all our lives accustomed. She, at least, was so desirous of an entire change that she had married a plebeian for his riches and

what she hoped to get out of them. She had been disappointed, as most people are who make sordid matches; and so were her predecessors, since Mr. Aspenel had been thrice wed.

As she sat in her morning-room, pondering over the peculiarities of her husband, who had just driven off, and listening to the distant hilarity of the housemaids, she looked what she was—utterly bored and discontented. She had undertaken a post for which she was quite unsuited, and her salary did not suffice to compensate to her for its penalties.

'How could I have married him?' she muttered, as she thought first of his personal appearance, then of the school-room and nursery.

Not that he was ill-looking. She had watched him get into his brougham, and was forced to confess that although his figure was spare, and he had what she called a money-getting stoop in his shoul-

ders, his carriage was not bad, and the cut of his head, hair, and beard respectable. The latter were iron grey, sprucely clipped, and meritoriously superintended. She sometimes wished them white and rough, and their owner less scrupulously neat and clean, just for a change. 'Anything for a change,' she sighed.

Still she dreaded the change that sometimes happened in his small black eyes. They were naturally bright and cunning, but occasionally grew so fierce and foxy that she was afraid of them and him. She was told when she married that she would have her own way in everything, but she found that he was resolved to have his, and, like many another who makes rash promises for imaginary gain, she got no compensation for her venture.

'What can I do with those children?' she groaned, as she seated herself at a luxuriously-furnished writing-table. 'I know I have the reputation of being a

sort of *marâtre*, and they hate me accordingly. I can do with Edith, but Janet is aggressive, and browbeats Bruce, and would rule me if she could. She must go to school, but Bruin grudges the money, and I cannot possibly spare it out of my niggardly allowance.'

Mrs. Aspenel was in the habit of calling her husband Bruin when alone with her own thoughts, and being young and sprightly, and not over-conscientious, saw no harm in it. People said 'there was no harm in her,' but her actions sometimes belied this opinion. She was naturally hasty of speech and quick of judgment, and, although not devoid of kindness of heart, frequently obscured her virtues by her vices. The latter word may be strong, but are not all bad passions vices?

No sooner had she taken pen in hand with the intention of writing to her intimate friend, Lady Ascham, to make inquiries concerning schools in general,

than there was a sound of pattering feet in the corridor, followed by many thumps on the door, and attended by shouts of 'Mammy, mammy!'

She was on her feet in a moment, had opened the door, and was soon hugging a riotous, screaming boy, with a whip in his hand. This was her only child, Master Bruce, who answered her pathetic inquiries as to what was the matter, by sobbing repetitions of the word, 'Janet, Janet!'

'What has Janet been doing now, darling?' asked the mother, soothingly.

'Nothing, ma'am,' replied for him a respectable-looking, middle-aged woman, who had followed him. 'Master Bruce kept on whipping and teasing Miss Janet, and when she pushed him away he tumbled down. He would smudge her drawing, ma'am!'

'Janet pinched me,' screamed the boy.

'Oh! Master Bruce, you promised me to tell the truth,' remonstrated the nurse.

'I hate Janet—I won't tell the truth,' was the answer.

'This must be put a stop to,' exclaimed Mrs. Aspenel, walking hastily down the corridor and mounting the staircase at its end, followed by Bruce and the nurse.

'Where are the young ladies?' she inquired.

'In the school-room, ma'am.'

Bruce declared his intention of going to the nursery, for he had an instinctive feeling that he might get the worst of it when face to face with Janet. Accordingly, Mrs. Aspenel marched into one room, and he and the nurse into another, which adjoined it.

The occupants of the former were two young girls, one of whom was seated at a table, crying over the drawing which Bruce had 'smudged'; the other bending caressingly over her, and seeking to comfort her.

'I won't bear it any longer,' sobbed the

juvenile artist, as Mrs. Aspenel appeared.

'What is all this, Janet? What have you been doing to Bruce?' she asked, severely, for she was in a passion.

'What has he been doing to me, rather,' asked Janet in return, suppressing tears and sobs with admirable self-command, and holding up a block, on which was a water-colour drawing, disfigured by many black marks.

The elder girl, Edith, suddenly disappeared into the nursery, which communicated with the school-room. She, like Bruce, avoided a collision, but hearing the word 'coward' sent after her, like some sharp missile, she returned and retired to a seat near the window. A contemptuous smile passed over Janet's face, but she rose and offered her chair to her step-mother, who sat down before the disfigured drawing.

'Bruce says you pinched him.'

'I did no such thing, Mrs. Aspenel. I

pushed him off when he snatched my brush from my hand, and then he put it right into the sepia and spoilt my drawing. He is the plague of one's life.'

'I should rather think you are the plague of his, as you are——' Here Mrs. Aspenel paused.

'Not of my father's, for I never see him,' put in spirited Janet. 'Nor of Edith's, nor of Nurse True's, nor——'

'Of mine, then. I think you had better go to school. Your governesses cannot manage you, and Mrs. Nunn left us on your account.'

Janet uttered a sound that in a boy might have been accounted a whistle, and repeated with a shrill voice,

'Mrs. Nunn!' then, turning to her sister, said rapidly: 'Edith knows as well as I do why Mrs. Nunn left. She said her salary was too low, and that she couldn't maintain her children upon it. Now, Edith,

can't you speak up? Didn't Mrs. Nunn say that?'

'Yes,' replied Edith, timidly.

'We were very fond of Mrs. Nunn, weren't we, Edith?'

'Very,' was the trembling response.

'Were you ever fond of anyone, Janet?' asked Mrs. Aspenel, with a sudden change of tone.

'I am very fond of Edith, and Nurse True, and——'

'But Edith is only your half-sister, just as Bruce is your half-brother, and Nurse True was her mother's maid.'

'My own mother was very fond of Edith, wasn't she, Edith? And we were always treated alike; and Nurse True says no one ever knew that Edith was not her very own daughter.'

'I think Nurse True had better hold her tongue.'

Mrs. Aspenel felt that she was getting

the worst of it, and with a slight twinge of conscience, reverted to her darling Bruce.

'Since Bruce is the plague of your life, Janet, perhaps you had better leave him, and, as I cannot manage you, a schoolmistress may.'

'We get on very well sometimes, but I don't like to have my drawings spoilt, and to be punished when he is naughty. He tells stories and I am blamed. I shall be very glad to go to school.'

'Oh, Janet!' came from pale Edith.

The colour rose to Mrs. Aspenel's cheeks and anger to her heart. She knew that she had not tried to gain the affection of these two girls, yet she could not put up with their dislike or indifference. She turned round from the drawing which she had apparently been contemplating all the time, and faced Janet, standing at the end of a long table. They might have been mother and daughter, for both were dark

and handsome, only Mrs. Aspenel did not look her age, and Janet looked older than she was. She was tall, slight, and angular, and not only her attitude but her face was defiant. The hazel eyes that melted to tears at a kind word flashed at injustice, and the colour rose and disappeared in her clear cheeks at every changing feeling. At the moment she was bristling with real or imaginary grievances, and decision lay in every muscle of her frame, especially in the hand which pressed the table.

'To school, then, you shall go if your father does not object,' said Mrs. Aspenel.

'That will suit all parties, if it is not too expensive,' returned Janet, with provoking resolution. 'But I fear that, if he found Mrs. Nunn's salary too heavy for his small income, he will not be able to afford a school. Shall I go as pupil-teacher?'

'You will remain in the school-room today. Your impertinence is insufferable, and your treatment of your brother quite

unbearable,' replied Mrs. Aspenel, rising, and looking as if she would fain chastise her step-daughter.

A reply rose to Janet's lips, but it was stayed by a touch. Edith laid her hand on her shoulder, and when she turned quickly she met her entreating glance.

'She does not mean to be impertinent, and she is not really unkind to Bruce,' breathed the elder girl, whose fear exceeded in proportion her sister's courage, and who had crept across the room with mouse-like quietude.

Mrs. Aspenel glanced haughtily at the pair. They were less alike than were she and Janet; for Edith was pale, fair-headed, and scarcely so tall as her sister, though three or four years her senior.

'I think, Edith, Janet and I can manage without interference,' she said, contemptuously. 'You are both resolved to annoy me, and I shall complain of your conduct to your father.'

The pressure of the small, white hand again restrained an answer from Janet that would have provoked further irritation, and Mrs. Aspenel, perceiving that no reply was intended, sailed out of the school-room and into the nursery. She found Bruce *en pénitence*, seated on a low chair at his nurse's knee. He was supposed to be learning a lesson. He started up, asking to be allowed to go with his mother.

'May I, nurse? I'm good now; and I won't spoil Janet's drawing no more,' he entreated.

'Of course you may, darling,' said his mother, and took him quickly away.

'Always the same!' muttered the nurse. 'Injustice to my dear lambs, and indulgence to her own. No sooner do I punish him than she spoils him. What is to be the end of it all? Had I not promised my dear mistress never to leave Miss Edith, I would not stay here an hour.'

'Is the coast clear?' here broke in Janet,

looking in at the door. 'Even you may venture, mousie, for there is no cat to eat you up.'

'I wish you would not talk in that way, Miss Janet. If you were more cautious, it might be better for us all. Edith, my sweetheart, you are ill.'

'Only a little frightened, nurse dear. My heart seems to rise to my mouth when Mrs. Aspenel appears. And I am sure she does not mean to be unkind.'

Edith walked timidly towards the rocking-chair on which her friend was moving to and fro, put her arms round her neck, and let fall a few suppressed tears. Janet's arms were instantly round the pair, and they were all in danger of an upset. They righted themselves, however, and were soon engaged in discussing the new plan of a school for Janet.

CHAPTER II.

HIS THREE WIVES.

Mr. Aspenel's first wife was a Miss Whalley. She was a lady of good family, or our ambitious millionaire would not have married her. Her father was an officer who was not over rich, and who had no scruples in advising his daughter to accept the proposal made to her by one whose fortune was already considerable. As she had no positive dislike to Mr. Aspenel, she did her utmost to please her father. She received him courteously, entered into his views, and finally fancied that she had a preference for him. He was not then quite so greedy of gain as he became as years went

on, and he was neither ill-looking nor deficient in good manners, so it ended in her marrying him. If he had any affection for aught but money, it was for her.

She was a delicate, fragile creature, and soon found that her despotic lord and master took small heed of her. She saw little of her family, for they lived at a distance, and her husband never approved of visitors who stayed in the house. He considered it loss of time, and did not see why he should spend his money in keeping those who could afford to keep themselves. Besides, his breakfast-table was sacred to himself, his wife, his newspapers, and his accounts. A stranger would have interfered with these domestic arrangements, and accordingly Mrs. Aspenel led a solitary life. Her husband frequently brought back with him to dinner such friends as could return to their homes the same night, and occasionally entertained the Dons and Donesses of the neighbourhood; but,

beyond this and morning calls, she had no society. She was herself a north-country woman, and often pined for the hospitality to which she had been accustomed; but being naturally amiable and yielding, she made no complaint. Thus, Mr. Aspenel's introduction to matrimony was unattended by the 'jars,' sometimes associated with that second estate, married-manhood, which he was wont to compare with the first, bachelorhood, and, subsequently, with the third, widowerhood.

When Mrs. Aspenel married she brought with her from the north a maid named Trueman, whom she had known all her life, and who was devoted to her almost with the devotion of clanship. She it was who had consoled her when she lost her first child, and had promised never to forsake her second, for the first Mrs. Aspenel died a few days after the birth of Edith, and two years subsequently to her marriage, confiding the infant, with her

last gasp, to the care of her faithful attendant.

'Call her Edith, and never forsake her,' she had breathed, just as her husband hurried into the room.

He had been telegraphed for some hours before, but thousands of pounds hung on his being at his office just then, and his scales were pretty equally weighted by money on one and life on the other. Money, however, outweighed life, and in saving the one he was too late for the other, for death met him on the threshold of his home.

'No one could possibly blame me,' he thought, as he looked regretfully on his dead wife, and heard his infant daughter wailing.

He mourned her for several hours, and then went for consolation to his accounts, which were so complicated and intricate that no mathematician had more engrossing means of comfort than he.

He made no objection to Mrs. Trueman's undertaking the sole charge of 'the muling and puking' baby; and no two words could better describe the infant than those immortal and very natural ones of Shakespeare. Edith was a tiny, delicate snowdrop from her birth, and the wonder was that she ever pierced through earth's hard crust at all, and grew up capable of hanging her drooping head on her fragile stem. Humanly speaking, she would not but for Nurse Trueman—Nurse True, or True nurse, so the children called her as years sped on.

Before she was quite two years old, her father brought her a step-mother. He had a short memory for all save his arithmetic, and honestly confessed that he could not live without a wife. If he was a rich man when he first married, he was a richer when he prevailed on Sir Connop Gerard's widow to bestow on him her youngest daughter. Of course she had no money,

for Sir Connop had run through his fortune, and his widow was nearly penniless; but Mr. Aspenel looked only for family, and having married the daughter of a general officer first, aspired to the baronetcy next, and his aspirations were not disappointed.

His second wife was very different from his first, being a bright, high-spirited girl, who had a fancy for a fine home and a change from comparative poverty to certain wealth. She did not pretend to be in love with Mr. Aspenel, but she had no positive dislike to him, for he had the power of making himself pleasant if he chose, and, as we have said, was rather good-looking and well got up. Of course, when a girl marries on no better foundation than this, she must take the consequences.

She did take them with tolerable cheerfulness, and put up with one of them much better than was expected. This was her small step-daughter. She took her at once to her heart, and with her the nurse which

had been providentially given her. Not even when her own little daughter arrived did she allow her to be displaced. As Janet said, no onlooker could discover that any difference was made in the treatment of the two children; if there were any preference shown, Edith certainly was the one preferred. The shrinking snowdrop was never molested, while the hardier celandine was often blown about by the March winds.

Mrs. Aspenel the second had a quick temper, and was impetuous and warm-hearted, so that if annoyed she wanted an object for her temporary displeasure, and would always rather reprove her own offspring than her predecessor's, while she usually petted and spoilt both.

Being high-spirited and particularly sociable, she managed to scrape acquaintance with such scions of gentility as lived in the neighbouring village of Roselands, and introduced the clergyman to the Park

on more intimate terms than her husband quite liked. Roselands had been the name of his property until he changed it to Aspenel Park, following, unwittingly, the scriptural description of those who call their possessions 'after their own names.' But he failed to alter that of the village, which did not belong to him. He succeeded, however, in changing the title of a neighbouring cluster of houses from 'The Roselands Cottages' to 'The Aspenel Homes,' because he assumed he had a right over them. This right was, however, disputed, he asserting that he had purchased them with the Park; and Lord Beechton declaring that they were built and endowed by an ancestor of his, whose descendants had no right to sell them. Lord Beechton was a great landed proprietor who lived about five miles from Aspenel Park, and the disputed cottages lay near the village of Roselands, and just outside the Park.

They consisted of a group of six small

and pretty houses, enclosed in a lawn, or, more properly, field, and built by a philanthropist for the benefit of half-a-dozen 'decayed gentlewomen,' as people call poor ladies who, having no private means, are content to live upon the means provided for them by the benevolent. Widows or single ladies were equally available for admission into the Aspenel Homes, or Roselands Cottages, and these, without exception, used the latter name, in which we will humour them; for there is no reason why ladies—or gentlemen either, for that matter—should be reminded of their indebtedness to some long-departed benefactor, by that much-abused word 'Home.' Not but that the Cottages were really very nice and pleasant homes, in which, if women ever could 'dwell together in unity,' the six impecunious ladies who tenanted them might have ended their days in peace.

They are particularly mentioned here because Mrs. Aspenel the second, in her

kindness of heart and need of sympathy, made the acquaintance of the six ladies, and because her own mother's sister dwelt amongst them. She, however, only took possession of the abode a few months before her niece's death, and but for that niece would never have tenanted it. The widow of a poor clergyman, she was looking about for the means of livelihood, when she heard of the Cottages, and wrote to Mrs. Aspenel to inquire if there were a vacancy. It is unnecessary to enter upon the difficulties which Mrs. Aspenel encountered before she prevailed on her husband to nominate her. At first he positively refused, but when his wife represented to him that he was expected to help to maintain her, and actually asked him for money for that purpose, he relented, and said she might fill the next vacancy, provided he were no more pestered with her.

Edith was nine years old and Janet six when their mother was seized with an ill-

ness that ended in decline. She had time given her to arrange her mortal affairs, and to prepare for the immortal. Nurse Trueman had now two children committed to her care, and she undertook the charge in faith. Her simple piety and enduring love for Edith had not been without effect on Mrs. Aspenel, who was naturally worldly; and when she was solemnly asked if she would be to Janet what she had been to Edith, and never forsake either, she replied,

'I will, God helping me.'

Mrs. Aspenel had made herself much beloved, both by domestics and her outer world, but her children idolised her, as she, indeed, did them. She had taught them herself, aided by Trueman, and in teaching them had learnt her own lessons, particularly religious ones. She had sought to influence her husband, but she saw even less of him than had his first wife, for he grew more and more engrossed with his golden

idol. However, he managed to be with her when she died, though the weight of this heavy god, that he always carried with him, had more power than her last words.

'Be kind to the children. Let Nurse True always live with them. Think of the world to which I am going. Oh! come to the Saviour!'

He stood beside her while she expired in the good nurse's arms, her aunt and the children being also present, but whether he grieved or not none could tell. Indeed he could not tell himself. Men with one engrossing passion rarely feel for anything outside it.

'I could not help her dying. She has had all she wanted,' he said to her aunt afterwards, who remained the day with him and the children, unasked, and fancied that he drank more heavily than usual, as if to drown some sort of feeling.

This brief story of Mr. Aspenel's two wives is merely to serve to account for the

state of affairs at the commencement of our first chapter. In less than a twelve-month after the death of the second he married the lady to whom we have been introduced. She was the daughter of the Hon. James Bruce, who, though the son of a peer of the realm, was delighted to wed his daughter to one of the richest commoners of England, and was not too particular in examining the branches of his son-in-law's family-tree when the settlements were made.

They had been married nearly six years when our story began, and their only child was the Master Bruce who was 'the plague of Janet's life,' and the paramount anxiety of Nurse True's. She found herself in a very difficult position, since she was compelled to seek favour from this youthful autocrat and his mother, if she were to fulfil the mission imposed upon her by her previous mistresses. Being true by nature as well as by name, and never having been

taught the diplomatic art, as political state nurses have, she was often astonished at the results of her own measures. But she would say to Edith, who was her confidant in every difficulty,

'I pray, and the Lord hears me.'

CHAPTER III.

FAN.

'You know it was a story, Nurse True,' exclaimed the still exasperated Janet, when the trio in the nursery had righted themselves after the episode in the rocking-chair.

'Perhaps not exactly a story, only a mistake, my dear. You were often troublesome to Mrs. Nunn, and she may have complained to Mrs. Aspenel.'

'Then she was a nasty, cross old thing; but I don't believe she did. She left because Mr. Aspenel wouldn't pay her a proper salary.'

'Pray say my father, and not Mr.

Aspenel, Miss Janet. Whatever has put that into your head? It was very obstinate of you not to call Mrs. Aspenel mother.'

'That was my fault, Nurse True,' put in Edith. 'I could not bear the idea of a third mother. I cannot remember my own mother, and our mother was so dear that I could never acknowledge another. Janet only followed my lead. I think Mrs. Aspenel does not mind, and my father does not know.'

'I don't believe he is our father, for he takes no notice of us,' said Janet. 'I don't mind calling him papa, for that word doesn't occur in the Bible, you know. There is something very solemn in the word father, and almost all the fathers are kind. So I shall say papa.'

'It does not much matter which,' returned the nurse; 'but, if you think of the Bible, remember it tells you to "honour your father."'

Janet was silent, and sat biting her lip.

'May we go and see auntie?' asked Edith, always nervous at this sign of temper. 'I will ask Mrs. Aspenel about Bruce.'

'Bravo, Edith! that is more than I could do,' cried Janet. 'But I won't accompany you, if that young imp—— He is an imp, Nurse True. Look at my poor drawing, and I meant to present it to Mr. Austen.'

Edith, who had a mortal fear of giving offence, was anxious to show Mrs. Aspenel that she had meant none when she sided with Janet, so she hastened downstairs. When she reached Mrs. Aspenel's room, however, she stood some time at the door before she ventured to knock, and, when she did so, the imperative 'Come in,' frightened her. She found her step-mother with Bruce on her lap, and a plate of sweetmeats before them. She explained that she had come to ask whether Mrs. Aspenel

wished Bruce to go out, as it was the usual time for a walk.

'I won't go with Janet,' screamed the boy, and the question was settled at once.

'You see how it is, Edith. It is impossible to get on when you all conspire against him, even Nurse True,' said Mrs. Aspenel, haughtily.

'We are all very fond of Bruce, when he is good,' rejoined Edith. 'I am sorry if I annoyed or offended you just now, when I agreed with Janet about Mrs. Nunn. I think they liked one another very well.'

Edith was one of those natures, timid when taken at unawares, self-possessed when having time for reflection. Mrs. Aspenel was hot and hasty, and disliked all interference.

'You are always sorry for one thing and another, Edith. I wish you would be just. You must know that Janet rebels against every person and thing, and

provokes Bruce until he pays her back.'

'Oh! Mrs. Aspenel!' ejaculated Edith, her favourite exclamation when she was afraid to reply more fully.

'The only way out of these complications that I can find is to send Janet to school, and I shall ask Mr. Aspenel about it this evening.'

Edith sighed.

'You have no objection to our going to the Cottages to see Mrs. Clarville?' she said, by way of changing the subject.

'I think you generally go whether I object or not; but since Janet's mother saw no impropriety in placing her aunt in an almshouse, and allowing her to receive charity at her husband's gates, I suppose she is a proper person to be visited. But how you can endure sitting with those old women I can't imagine. It must be *faute de mieux*. Of course we must be civil to Mrs. Clarville, since she is a sort of connection, but the others!—I see them now!

Miss Short, pacing up and down the gravel walk, with her long walking-stick and poked bonnet, followed by the maid. Then Mrs. Lucy and her corkscrew curls. She objects to her juvenile maid wearing a fringe, but persists in curling her own hair. I see no difference. I have never had the pleasure of an introduction to bedridden Miss Lorne, but the sentimental Lilyton, and the strong-minded and literary Vigors, are my abhorrence.'

'They say you are very kind and condescending when they come to tea,' said Edith, smiling.

'One must be polite in one's own house; and, since I understand they none of them visit one another, it amuses me to have them here all together.'

'Auntie visits them all. Nurse True calls her "oil on the troubled waters."'

'She is not your aunt, Edith. Why do you call her so?'

'I suppose because Janet does.'

'Then, if Janet called me mother, you would probably do the same. I am surprised at your allowing yourself to be led by the nose by a child three or four years your junior.'

Mrs. Aspenel flushed, and Edith was silent, perceiving for the first time that there was a grievance under her stepmother's apparent nonchalance. The momentary silence was broken by Bruce, who, having devoured all the sweetmeats, began to think of dinner, and asked, noisily enough, when it would be ready. Mrs. Aspenel looked at her watch, and said,

'There will not be time for your antiquarian researches before dinner, Edith, so you had better go afterwards, and Bruce shall drive with me.'

'Thank you; I will tell Janet,' returned Edith, and hurried back to her sister rejoicing.

The children dined at luncheon, and it was usually a stiff and silent meal. An

occasional guest broke its monotony, otherwise few words were spoken, save by Bruce, who was allowed to say just what he pleased. The antagonism between Mrs. Aspenel and Janet was never laid aside.

But all was forgotten when the two girls and Nurse True found themselves in the Park, with an afternoon before them in which to do just what they liked.

'How nice it is to have you all to ourselves again, Nurse True!' cried Janet. 'I am glad Mrs. Nunn is gone, though I maintain that it was money not I that sent her away.'

And, unquestionably, money it was; for Mrs. Nunn asked for an increase of salary, was refused politely by Mr. Aspenel in person, and resigned her post.

He was in the habit of getting all that he could out of people at the cheapest rate, and reflected that what one would not do another would. Accordingly he was already on the look-out for a 'cheap govern-

ess,' knowing full well that in the multitude of unemployed ladies he should assuredly find one who would 'teach everything for a nominal emolument.'

Edith paused beside the lake to feed the swans. It was spring, and just where she stood grew several pink and white hawthorn-trees in full blossom. Sheltering them towered a group of horse-chestnuts, also clad in green and white, and it would have been difficult to say which was the fairer—swans, flowers, or pale-faced maiden. Janet left her in hot haste, and before Nurse True could arrest her was running at full speed across a side-walk beneath an avenue of elms, towards a house on the outskirts of the Park.

'We must go after her,' said Nurse True; and she and Edith followed Janet.

Looking back towards the house they saw the carriage at the door, and congratulated one another that they had not Bruce to look after as well as Janet, since

they knew not which was the wilder. The house looked well from the side avenue. It was situated on a slight eminence, and stood out from a background of trees, a stately mansion, porticoed, pillared, and stuccoed to a shining whiteness. Mr. Aspenel spared no money in maintaining its personal appearance, and neither flaw nor discolourment was allowed to deface it. His own outer man was not more scrupulously attended to than was the outside of his abode. It looked pure as did Edith and her swans.

'How brightly the sun shines into the windows!' said that young lady, as she glanced across at the carriage. 'I suppose glass reflects only, since the shine flickers from pane to pane, and the least cloud effaces it. That is just what I am. The sun is in my heart one minute, and gloom the next.'

'Dear love! you take things too gravely for your years; just as your dear mother

did,' returned Nurse True, whose broad north-country accent never deserted her.

'I wish I could do something kind to Mrs. Aspenel,' said Edith, reflectively.

'The time is sure to come, lovey. Watch your opportunities, and have patience,' was the reply.

They hurried after Janet, but her figure was out of sight in no time.

'No good to hasten. Let her have her joy, poor child,' said Nurse True, and they slackened their steps.

They eventually reached an iron swing-gate, placed beneath an archway in the park wall, and leading into a country road. This road was a favourite and favoured spot, for it was flanked with hawthorn hedges and adorned with wayside flowers. In summer wild roses bloomed here, in autumn traveller's-joy, and always some frond or floweret lurked beneath the thorns. Here, too, were cottages, and here was the big brick school-house, lately

built to accommodate many Board schools. But there was another school-house in the village, old and ivy-clad, which the vicar maintained for such parishioners as preferred the voluntary to the Board-school system. And it must be confessed that most of the villagers were as conservative as was the Rev. Philip Austen, their 'pastor and master,' and affected what they called 'the Church school.'

Edith and Nurse True walked briskly down this road, receiving and returning salutations from the cottagers, till they reached a substantial brick house called Hoplands, probably after the flourishing hop-gardens in the neighbourhood. They went through a swing-gate into a large garden surrounding the house, and full of spring flowers. The round bed in the middle of the gravel-walk was ablaze with tulips, and in the borders flourished hepaticas, polyanthuses and Russian violets, surmounted by various shrubs, among which

the laurustinus had the pre-eminence. The door was open, and they went into the hall. They heard Janet's voice in the dining-room, and Edith tapped at its door.

'Come in,' sounded from a cheery voice, and she entered, Nurse True remaining in the hall. 'Miss Aspenel! this is good for sore eyes!' continued the same cheery voice.

It proceeded from a middle-aged man, who was seated in an elbow-chair near a large fire, with Janet on a stool at his knees.

'I hope you are better, Mr. Harton,' said Edith, going towards him and putting her small hand in his.

'Oh, yes! I am better, but the rheumatism sticks to me like a leech. I was just telling Miss Janet that we have heard from Jack at last. He has fallen on his feet in the wilds of Canada, and says he is already in a fair way of making his fortune. My boys have their father's hopeful tem-

perament, and, like Micawber, declare that something is always on the eve of "turning up."'

'But it does turn up,' cried Janet, enthusiastically. 'I wish Tom would come back.'

'My dear child, it will never do for you to call my boys by their Christian names,' laughed Mr. Harton, laying his hand on her head. 'What would your father and Mrs. Aspenel say?'

'Our mother didn't object, did she, Edith?' asked Janet; 'and I don't care what Mrs. Aspenel says. Papa never thinks about it, or cares what becomes of us.'

'Where is Fan?' interrupted Edith.

'Taking my place in giving orders and managing man, woman, and child,' said Mr. Harton. 'She thinks herself a woman of importance, and is ruining me by bringing in every beggar and his brat that comes near the house.'

'That is just what you did to her,' whispered Janet.

Voices sounded in the hall, and in another moment the door was flung open, and a young girl was seen struggling with Nurse True, while several dogs were barking and leaping round them.

'You must come in. Sir will be so angry,' she shouted at the top of her voice.

'Pray do, Mrs. Trueman. I would get up to escort you if I could, but I am chained to my chair,' said Mr. Harton. 'Fan, you needn't be quite so violent.'

'She won't come unless I force her,' cried Fan, still struggling with Nurse True.

Janet ran towards them, and was soon kissing Fan energetically, while Nurse True advanced towards Mr. Harton. Fan was a born hoyden of sixteen, or thereabouts, of the true gipsy type of beauty. Black hair, black eyes, red lips, red cheeks, a box of teeth as white as the snow in

which she was found, and a complexion as dark as if she had really been the Egyptian people supposed her to be; in other words, a stray from a gipsy-tent. Everybody called her Fan, both rich and poor, and everybody adopted her, everybody except Edith, who was afraid of her. But, as they were in such different positions, they saw but little of one another. Indeed, when Fan perceived Edith, she made a little curtsey, and did not attempt to offer her hand till Edith held out hers. Miss Aspenel had the reputation of being proud, as reserved, shy people frequently have.

To Janet's mortification, Nurse True proposed their pursuing their way to the cottages; but before they left, Mr. Harton gave a third account of how he had heard from Jack.

'And he has killed a skunk which smelt awfully, and cleared away yards of snow, and been nearly frozen to death, and felled more trees than ever Mr. Gladstone felled

in all his long life, and been half-starved —poor Jack!' said Fan, with tears in her big black eyes. 'But he is building a log-hut, and says I shall go out to keep house for him if Sir can spare me. But that would be impossible.'

In a moment her hand was on Mr. Harton's shoulder, and the lustrous eyes looking into his.

'Nobody could spare Fan!' exclaimed Janet, rising from her low seat at a glance from Nurse True.

'We can keep our girls, Mrs. Trueman, though there is no holding in the boys nowadays,' said Mr. Harton. 'Fortunately I have Fan, my books, and my newspapers, but I am half-afraid the property will go to rack and ruin.'

'Not yours, sir. God will never forsake those who work for their fellow-creatures as you do,' returned Nurse True.

'Thank you, Mrs. Trueman, for that word of comfort. Remember me to the

old ladies—I beg their pardons, they don't like to be called old—none of us do.'

Fan accompanied her visitors to the gate, followed by her train of dogs, and, as she watched them down the road, muttered,

'I wish I was as white as a lily, like Miss Aspenel, and not black as a nigger, like—like Fan.'

CHAPTER IV.

THE GIPSIES.

Mr. Harton was also watching the vanishing forms of the trio from the park, as they passed beneath the low wall that served as boundary between his garden and the road. The garden itself was almost level with the top of the wall, and thus enabled him to watch the passers-by. Many thoughts rushed through his mind while Fan stood at the garden-gate surrounded by his dogs. They concerned Mr. Aspenel and his family, as well as his own, for he had known something of the former in his youth, and had marked his rise, progress, marriages, and millionaireism

from that period to the moment when he sat a prisoner from rheumatism, following with his eyes the movements of his daughters. But he knew no more than other people of Mr. Aspenel's birth and parentage. He had been a successful man, and that was enough for him as well as for the world at large.

He heartily disliked Mr. Aspenel, and, whenever he chanced to come in contact with him, they were sure to quarrel. There was one especial grievance between them: Mr. Aspenel was for uprooting the gipsies from the neighbourhood, and kindly Mr. Harton insisted on allowing them to pitch their tents on his land whenever they chanced to come that way. 'Live and let live,' was his motto; and he would moralise on the short lives probably in store for the strange people that always interested him. He knew that their race was gradually dwindling away here in England, and that few of the genuine

descendants of the swarthy wanderers from Egyptian or Tartarian deserts—as might be—still survived. Intermarriage with other vagabonds of British extraction had tainted the pure Asian or Egyptian blood, and he would sigh when he thought of it, for he was somewhat of a dreamer, and therefore not so utilitarian as his age. He had tried to puzzle out the Romany dialect, but no sooner had he dug down to the root of one verb, than he found it crossed by some horrible English or Irish sister, and so, as in the intermarriages, nothing but an unintelligible jargon was left.

'It is hard to drive them from pillar to post till they are hunted out of the world,' he would say, when Mr. Aspenel remonstrated, 'and they are welcome to my little bits of waste land, so long as I have any left me.'

Mr. Aspenel, who never wasted words, would turn on his heel, with the epithet 'fool' on his lips; while Harton, who was

a strictly religious man, would also mutter the same word, but with an addenda which made it legitimate: 'Thou fool! this night thy soul shall be required of thee.' Thus these neighbours were always at issue, not only on this, but on every subject that ought to have made them more neighbourly. Mr. Aspenel was not, however, the only neighbour who blamed Mr. Harton, and, when on a biting winter's day Fan was thrust upon his tender mercies, they all said, 'Serve him right'—all except his rector and friend, the Rev. Philip Austen, a good man and true, who would fain have made all Christendom Christ-like.

Nobody could doubt that Fan was a born gipsy, but how she came to Roselands in mid-winter not even Mr. Harton could guess. His gipsy friends always visited him in spring, summer, or autumn, but never in winter. During that inclement season they usually migrated to the towns, or lived in their vans, if they had them;

at any rate his land was free of them, therefore he could not account for Fan. His wife had found her one morning outside the garden-gate, with her long black hair matted with hoar-frost, and her poor little bare feet covered with chilblains; had found her just where she is standing now, watching her young neighbours, and longing to be 'as fair as a lily, like Edith.' Ten years or thereabouts before she had been watching for her mother and a promised cake, but, when Mrs. Harton appeared, had said, with more of the London than the Romany dialect, 'Give us a copper please, mum.'

'She was evidently a precocious child,' said Mrs. Harton. 'Much more forward in talking than had been either Jack or Tom.' All that Mrs. Harton could get from her was that her name was Fan, and her mother's Clorandy, and that she was to stay by the gate till she got her a cake. But as neither mother nor cake appeared,

and Mrs. Harton, who was as generous as her husband, could not let a child die of cold at her very door, Fan was taken into Hoplands and regaled with hot broth, while Jack was set to watch for the errant parent. She never returned, and there was no clue to Fan's history; not even the initialed garment or amulet of romance. Mr. Harton closely questioned his friends the gipsies, but, either from clanship or absolute lack of knowledge, he elicited nothing. Clorandy, or Clorinda, was a favourite name, and there were several gipsy women who bore it, but none was forthcoming, so he gradually ceased to inquire, leaving the development of the child's history to Providence.

The Union was suggested for her abode, and would probably have been accepted, had not Master Jack taken a great fancy to her, and, as he was youngest born and his mother's favourite, she was received into the Hoplands kitchen pending inquiry.

It ended in her remaining there for a few weeks, but finally Mrs. Harton kept her until she should be claimed by the gipsies. As this never took place, and as she proved a very amusing and companionable child, she was allowed to grow up at Hoplands. At first her protectors meant to make a servant of her, but somehow she slipped into their affections, and, when Mrs. Harton was taken ill, became a necessity to that good lady. When Mrs. Harton died, she became equally a necessity to her husband, and so, as general messenger for the master, romp and plaything of the boys, and torment of the servants, Fan grew up with a very desultory education.

At first she was sent to the village-school with the village children; then she was advanced to a superior seminary whither the farmers' daughters went before they were drafted to boarding-school, and finally one of the inmates of the Roselands Cottages had asked to be allowed to complete her

education on the voluntary system, as she refused remuneration ; and Fan was terribly trammeled by the reading of abstruse books under the supervision of a lady who had once been a governess in a nobleman's family.

'Why didn't the nobleman keep her, and not let her come down here to bother me?' Fan had frequently asked of her friend Jack.

'Because the nobleman was very glad to get rid of her, and have board and lodging found for her without dipping into his purse,' replied shrewd Jack.

Fan was still completing her education with Miss Vigors when she uttered that irrational wish respecting her complexion, and Mr. Harton lived on in hopes that he might eventually find in her an intellectual companion. He was, himself, a great reader, and malicious people whispered that it would be better for himself and his family if he read less, and attended more

to his affairs. He looked, indeed, a book-worm as he sat in his somewhat uneasy chair with a ponderous tome beside him, and a black velvet cap surmounting his high and broad forehead. He was a large man both as regarded width and height, and, not having as yet grown the patriarchal beard, his well-shaven face was clearly developed. His features were regular, and his dark eyes had an expression of humour that mingled now and again with their more prevailing one of thought. But, whatever his mood, nothing destroyed the sweetness of that character-indicator, the mouth, and his boys were wont to say that, however cross father might be, his mouth was always good-tempered.

'I don't like Miss Aspenel as well as Miss Janet, but I wish I was as fair as she,' cried Fan, breaking in upon Mr. Harton's musings, followed by the dogs.

Tossing off her hat, she took the stool at

his feet vacated by Janet, and the four dogs grouped themselves round her.

'You are jealous, lass. Your poor mother always said that was your worst fault.'

'Then I will cure of it,' said Fan, setting her face and clenching her teeth, and suddenly grasping the shaggy coat of a retriever who lay nearest to her. 'All gipsies are jealous. I wish I weren't a born gipsy, don't you, old Rolf?'

She tugged at the dog's hair until he turned round upon her with remonstrating eyes and a whine.

'He'd have bitten anybody else, Fan,' said Mr. Harton.

'Of course he would, Sir, and quite right too. But he knows me, and the sort of girl I am; don't you, Rolf?'

Rolf's paws were instantly on her shoulders, and his tongue uncomfortably protruded towards her cheek.

'I wish Jack had Rolf, don't you, Sir?

Jack has nobody, and I can't go and keep his house, because you couldn't do without me, could you, Sir?'

She had been taught, as a child, to call Mr. Harton 'Sir,' and she had now no other name for him. If she inquired for him, it was as often, 'Where is Sir?' as 'Where is Mr. Harton?'

'What a question, Fan. You are the only one at home just now. Of course I could not do without you. But is not this your afternoon for Miss Vigors?'

'I have just been to tell her that, as you have the rheumatism, I am wanted at home.'

'Naughty Fan. I thought you were interested in that book I lent Miss Vigors on geology.'

'It is a bad book, sir. I don't believe a word of it. It tries to make one think that a day is thousands of years, and I know very well that a day means a day, and nothing more; and I haven't the least

interest in old stones, and fossils, and things that happened before the Deluge, and even the Bible. I like the world and the people just as they are, and don't care a straw for the pre-Adamites. It is all bosh.'

'Perhaps you are right, Fan. But what does Miss Vigors say? She is pre-eminently intellectual.'

Fan burst out into a most unintellectual fit of laughter, in which Mr. Harton joined, for, though he delighted in a literary gossip with Miss Vigors, he never thought of her without a smile.

'Here is Mr. Austen,' shouted Fan, jumping up and running to the hall-door to let in an elderly clergyman, the rector of Roselands.

'Well, Fan, and how is the invalid?' he asked.

'Scarcely an invalid, Austen,' came from the dining-room, 'but right glad to see you.'

'Jack is building a log-hut, and has killed a skunk. What is a skunk, Mr. Austen? Sir won't tell me. He says I must look it out in the cyclopedia,' said Fan, preceding him to Mr. Harton's chair.

'Jack killed a skunk!' exclaimed Mr. Austen. 'Why, that is more than dogs will do, he has such an intolerable odour. He is a kind of weasel, Fan, happily devoted to home, and, unlike the young people of this age, not as yet finding it necessary to "make the grand tour." He hasn't come to Europe, as most Americans do, and long may he stop at home.'

As soon as Mr. Austen was seated, Fan ran off, followed by her dogs, and left the two men to the discussion of affairs, public and private.

CHAPTER V.

THE OLD LADIES.

Edith, Janet, and Nurse True pursued their way rapidly when they left Hoplands. They skirted the park wall until they came to that bone of contention, the Cottages. These were half-a-dozen small houses, enclosed within iron gates, and seated in the centre of a kind of lawn. The builder must have had an eye to the picturesque, for the frontage was pretty, and the verandah that accompanied it light and airy. Beneath this verandah were six doors and six windows, and in front neat flower-beds terminated by a gravel-walk. Above the said verandah were six Elizabethan win-

dows, over which protecting eaves protruded. On all sides save that which opened into the road stretched fields, and a more peaceful spot could scarcely be conceived. In summer the houses were a mass of flowers and creepers, and even in this springtide the walls were not bare of leaves. Primroses and violets flourished everywhere, and a casual visitor would have said how happy must be the inmates of this sequestered scene.

Janet was the first to set foot on the verandah.

'Here we are, auntie, at last!' she shouted, as she burst open the door, rushed through the little hall, and upstairs into the neatest, smallest, and most elegant of sitting-rooms. 'Not here!' she added. 'Then she must be in her room.' And she tore off, heedless of ornaments, to a wee and equally pretty sleeping apartment at the back of the house.

As this was also empty, she ran down-

stairs at once, shouting 'Auntie' at the top of her voice, and into a tiny kitchen. Here a juvenile maid-of-all-work was toasting and buttering tea-cakes.

'What's up, Miranda?' she asked. And the girl rejoicing in that high-sounding name pointed to the back door.

She had the toasting-fork between her teeth while she was manipulating the cake, so she could not speak, and Janet, whose dignity was easily offended, muttered,

'That comes of taking Cousin Gerard's slum-children into one's service.'

But she entered the miniature and spotless scullery, nevertheless, and went out into what was magnificently styled 'the back garden,' still screaming 'Auntie.'

In another moment she had flung herself almost upon the back of a lady in a broad hat and gardening apron, who, with trowel in hand, was stooping over a bed of ferns.

'Wild as ever, Janet!' came from a

masculine voice, before Mrs. Clarville was able to release herself.

'Cousin Gerard! How jolly! That is why Miranda is buttering cakes,' screamed Janet, leaving Mrs. Clarville and seizing upon a stalwart young man who had his foot on a spade.

He stooped to kiss her, and she nearly upset him by twining her arms round his neck.

'Are there cakes enough for all, auntie? Edith and Nurse True are here, and we are come to tea. Bruce has gone off with Mrs. Aspenel, and we shall have you and Gerard all to ourselves. Isn't it jolly? We can sit four comfortably in the hall, for you know Nurse True never will join us, though you ask her. She always says, "I know my place."'

'She certainly does; which is more than we can say of all our domestics,' laughed Mrs. Clarville.

'We don't consider Nurse True a

domestic, but a friend,' said Janet, offended.

'But we are all domestics, Janet, if we are worth anything,' put in Gerard. 'I become one as soon as I come to Roselands. In town there is nothing to domesticate me.'

'Poor Gerard! You should have a cat.'

'My landlady's feline friend does pay me a visit now and then, and I begin to feel quite a family-man. Where is Miss Aspenel?'

'Let us surprise her. I will bring her here.'

Janet rushed off, and returned with Edith and Nurse True. There was a hearty greeting on all sides, but shy Edith was not so demonstrative as her sister, though very glad of an addition to the little party. Besides, Gerard was not her cousin, though she almost looked upon him as one.

Mrs. Clarville was a distinguished-look-

ing woman, verging on fifty. She was distinguished in other ways besides her appearance. She was gentle-voiced and gentle-mannered—a gentlewoman, in short. Mr. Austen called her justly his peace-maker, and said that his parish would be paradise if all its female inhabitants were like her. She was young-looking still, and declared that there was nothing to make her grow old, since she had all her wants supplied, and Gerard was the best of sons.

Although she was Janet's great-aunt, the girl treated her as a companion, and a sincere affection existed between them.

As to Gerard, he was Janet's beau-ideal of a hero, although she was always wishing that her hero was not a clerk in her father's office. Still, he was a sort of modern hero, for he was content to fight his battle just where God appointed, and he certainly had a hard field for his hand-to-hand combat. He had his aspirations,

as we all have, but he smothered some of them for his mother's sake and others for his own. He was personally like his mother, and they both seemed too big for the house they were in. As Janet said, they filled it.

'I shall help Miranda to lay the table, and do everything, Nurse True,' said Janet, decidedly; 'so you may go and see poor Miss Lorne and Rebecca.'

'Do. It will be kind to both,' said Mrs. Clarville; and Nurse True departed.

'What have you done with your fringe, Miranda?' asked Janet, while doing her best to hinder that damsel in her work.

'Missus wouldn't let me wear it,' replied Miranda, with a crestfallen air. 'I don't know what the gals will say when I goes home. You haven't got one, miss.'

'No. I don't like them, and they are going out of fashion. They are called the factory system. You were a factory girl were you not, Miranda?'

'No, miss, I was never nothin' till Mr. Clarville brought me here, and now missus says she'll make a servant of me. I'm the eldest of eight, and father's out of work, and I had to nurse, and wash, and everythink, while mother went out charing.'

'Had you a tiresome brother who wore your life out?'

'Bless you, miss, I had seven; but I'm alive still; and Mr. Clarville used to tell us never to mind, if we could help it; and I tried not to mind.'

Janet grew reflective and thought to herself, 'She is wiser than I.' Indeed the wisdom of the world seemed to her to be concentrated in that particular cottage, small as it was.

To avoid dirtying the one sitting-room, and to save trouble, Mrs. Clarville took her meals in the miniature hall, and they were quickly disposed of, as the kitchen communicated with it. There was, as Janet said, just room for four at the

oblong table, and on this occasion the quartette was very cheerful. Auntie's tea-cakes and bread-and-butter were always nicer than any at the Park, and certainly superior to what her son got in London; so appetite was not wanting at the feast. It was Gerard, not Miranda, who waited, and not only helped the ladies, but fetched the kettle from the kitchen, tended the small stove, drew the curtain over the door lest his mother should take cold, and made himself so useful that Janet declared he ought to have been a woman. She sometimes called him a 'Molly.'

'The best compliment you can pay me, Janet, since this is said to be "the woman's age;" and, if we men don't bestir ourselves, we shall be ousted from clerkships and professions by the so-called softer sex,' said Gerard.

'How very much frightened the poor women must be!' suggested Edith, to

whom the idea of publicity was distasteful.

'On the contrary, Miss Aspenel, they like it; not all, perhaps, but most. You would not.'

'I should,' interrupted Janet. 'I am going in for art, auntie. I am to be sent to school.'

'The best thing that could happen to you, Janet,' said Gerard; but his mother scarcely agreed.

When tea was over, he said he had much work to do before he returned to town by the last train. Janet volunteered to help, and the pair went together to the small plot of ground at the back, belonging to Mrs. Clarville's cottage. They picked off the dry fronds of the budding fern, commenting on the curled-up leaves, unfolding so carefully at the call of spring. They admired the green promise of fruit on the six currant-bushes. 'The exact number

of the cottages,' said Janet. They professed to weed the mustard-and-cress where not a weed was to be seen, and dug up such bits of ground as still lay fallow.

'It is multum in parvo, Janet. How does the mother manage to get so much into so little?' said Gerard.

'It is like her head; it holds everything,' was the reply.

Then the cousins went round to the front, and fastened up the trailing parasites. While they were doing this, a curious little figure stepped out from door No. 2.

'How do you do, Mr. Gerard? You are so tall and I am so short—short by name and stature—that I cannot reach that tiresome branch of japonica; and, if the wind catch it, good-bye to the tree,' it said.

Gerard instantly used the hammer and nails he held in his hand to confine the

obstreperous branch, while Miss Short and Janet entered into a lively conversation.

The little lady was said to be over eighty years of age, and held a walking-stick as tall as herself, but was as brisk as if she were eighteen. She was an incessant talker, and was sometimes even too much for Mrs. Clarville, who listened to the complaints of her neighbours with exemplary patience.

'Perhaps, my dear, you could prevail on your excellent father to lay down a little gravel in front and send a tiler to the roof. Timms would come at once, if he was sure of payment. And, now the spring is on, he might perhaps paint up the doors and windows for us; for truly we are going to decay. Nothing personal, my dear; I am quite well, thank you. And, as you see, the verandah wants looking to, and the very pavement is cracking. When I see your dear mamma, I will represent it to her; for your papa is so much engaged

that I never meet him. I don't know what we should do without Mr. Gerard, who is our Jack-of-all-trades, for there's nothing he cannot do, and, my dear, he's willing to do it, which one can't say of all men, young or old.'

When the japonica was properly affixed, Gerard said he was bound to go in to see Mrs. Lucy, for she considered that she had a right to him, being a widow, like his mother. Miss Short tramped off, making a rattle on the pavement with her walking-stick, and Gerard and Janet were soon ushered upstairs into a tiny apartment of the exact size of Mrs. Clarville's but less elegantly furnished. The chairs and tables were too big for the room, and the portraits that surrounded it must have come from some ancestral dining-room belonging to previous members of the Lucy family.

Mrs. Lucy was sitting bolt upright in one of the big, antique chairs. She held

out a limp hand, and welcomed them in a melancholy voice. She always had a grievance, and aired it whenever she could. To-day it was Miss Short's walking-stick, which was too much for her nerves; but, not being on visiting terms with Miss Short, she could not take the liberty of telling her how excruciating was the tap, tap, tap of her very ponderous support.

Gerard apologised for a short visit, and she said, with a deep sigh, that everybody was in a hurry in these fast days, but that she could not expect young people to stay with one who could no longer amuse them, and who was reduced from affluence to dependence.

'I'm sure Gerard would stay if he had time,' exclaimed Janet.

'I must inquire for the others, or my reputation will be gone,' said Gerard, tapping at No. 4.

Miss Lilyton was away on a visit, and

No. 5—Miss Vigors—had gone off in search of Fan and to have a gossip with Mr. Harton.

'Mistress will be sadly vexed to miss you, sir; for she says she enjoys an intellectual talk,' said a middle-aged woman, who had followed Miss Vigors to her present abode from a more pretentious one in which she formerly kept a school.

It was remarkable that three out of the six of these ladies had faithful friends, who had clung to them through good and ill. Gerard always said that this told well for human nature.

At No. 6, the last of the cottages, they were greeted by Nurse True, who was standing at the door with her particular friend, Rebecca Sure. She was waiting for Mrs. Clarville and Edith, who were upstairs with poor, bedridden Miss Lorne. All the inmates of the Cottages had histories more or less sad, but none interested Janet so much as Rebecca's, for, although

she was an elderly woman, there was still a romance to be ended in her life; for had she not still a lover? and had not old Stroke, the blacksmith, been waiting for her ever since they were both young, only (how many buts and onlys there are in life!)—only she would not marry so long as her mistress lived. That mistress had been the daughter of a previous incumbent of Roselands, and had devoted her life to works of love. Amongst these had been the bringing up as servant at the rectory of the orphan Rebecca, who had never left her from that day to this.

At the moment when she and Nurse True were saying their 'last words,' Miss Lorne was saying hers to Mrs. Clarville and Edith.

'Good-bye, dear friends. It seems as if the Lord was long in calling me; but He knows best. He summons the young and vigorous, and leaves the cumberers of the ground, like me. It seems mysterious.

I shall have lived ninety years ere long, and Rebecca is over sixty—happy years most of them; and now at their close God has sent you to me, dear Mrs. Clarville, and I thank Him heartily. You, Rebecca, and Mr. Austen, and you, my darling Edith—so like your mother!—are indeed very good to me.'

CHAPTER VI.

A JACK OF ALL TRADES.

No one knew exactly how Gerard Clarville had got into Mr. Aspenel's office. Neither he nor his mother could account for it. He was, in most respects, quite unlike his patron, and had to use much circumspection in his dealings with him; but how it was that he had been actually chosen by him as clerk, and how he had managed to keep his situation for six years, he could not understand. His mother had been with Mr. Aspenel at the time of the death of his second wife, and he had, in some slight degree, relaxed his constrained and formal manners towards her; but why he

had selected Gerard, of whom he knew literally nothing, as one of his acting aids, was a riddle both to him and his mother, who had merely mentioned once that she had an only son struggling for a maintenance.

Gerard was six-and-twenty, and like most active-minded young men often kicked against the goad of his wearisome and subservient life; but his watchword was duty, and his love his mother. He owed everything to her, for she had sacrificed literally 'all her living' to give him a fine education; and to make of him a gentleman and a Christian had been the paramount desire of her widowed life. He had not realised that to send him to college she had sold out of the funds and otherwise crippled her own means; but when he did realise it he declared his intention of accepting the first situation that offered. Her wish was to see him take orders, but as he felt no special call to the

ministry, and did not see how he could complete his collegiate course, she was obliged to yield her will to his. When she, finally, anchored at the Cottages, he knew that he had done right.

Mr. Aspenel kept him, as well as all his other dependents, sharply to their work. He grudged them their holidays, and doubtless would have found enough to employ them on Sundays as well as week days, had that been discreet, or, rather, had it looked respectable in the world's eyes. As it was, Bank Holidays and the Saturday *congé* were an abomination to him, and Sir John Lubbock would not have been gratified had he heard what he said of him. Not that he always granted his people their Bank Holiday, since he was pleased to affirm that he was not a banker, and that his dealings all over the world necessitated work all the year round. And we need scarcely say, in these days of overflowing population, that he found people

willing to work and grumble from year's end to year's end.

Not so Gerard. He held his own and received his due in the way of occasional recreation, and he always spent it at Roselands with his mother. He was a Sunday institution there, and helped the rector in choir, school, and evening class; he even read the lessons for him. Mr. Austen's children, male and female, were all married and settled at a distance; so that Gerard became almost as great a necessity to him as to the old ladies, who equally adopted him. The latter began to assume that they had as great a right to him as his mother had, and nothing went on in the six small dwellings without reference to Mr. Gerard. What he would think of the planting of such a flower, or the arrangement of such a picture, or the settling of such a difference, was a constant resource to these forlorn females, who often asserted that, 'had all men been like Mr. Gerard,

now, they need never have been reduced to live upon charity.' How ungrateful we all are! We even complain of the warmth of the hand that feeds us.

Mr. Aspenel sometimes honoured Gerard with an invitation to dinner of a Saturday night, when he and his mother went in state to the Park. Mrs. Clarville looked on Mr. Aspenel as a two-fold benefactor, and always did her best to uphold him when, behind his back, other people knocked him down; and she never ventured to decline his invitations. Thus Gerard had become tolerably well acquainted with Mrs. Aspenel, her son, and step-daughters, who generally welcomed him kindly. He was a good-looking fellow, and probably that had something to do with it. Janet and Miss Sharp were not far wrong in calling him a Jack-of-all-trades; but none was more perplexing than that of being factotum to three widows and three spinsters.

Not that he was their only masculine consolation. Contrary to custom, widowers preponderated in the village, and the rector and Mr. Harton, being untrammelled by the fair sex, were always ready for a gossip with the ladies when they came across them. Mr. Harton's sons, particularly Jack, had been the plague of their lives; but they were happily dispersed or dead, for he had lost two, and the Cottages were at peace. Of Mr. Aspenel they saw nothing, with the exception of Mrs. Clarville, who, being a connection, was of course privileged. But they were even more bitter against him than were his clerks, for, like the dog in the manger, he would not take the management, repairs, and ornamentation of their small abodes upon himself, nor let Lord Beechton take it. His lordship was very kind, nevertheless, and often sent them game, which was more than Mr. Aspenel ever did.

At about six o'clock of the day of our

introduction to Roselands, Nurse True interrupted a merry quartette in Mrs. Clarville's pretty sitting-room, by saying that it was time for her young ladies to depart; and the little gathering walked together to the big iron gates that enclosed the miniature park containing six houses instead of one. Prudent Mrs. Clarville had prevented Gerard's accompanying his young friends home from their earliest acquaintance; because, she said, Mr. Aspenel might not like it. Accordingly they parted at the gates. Just as they were shaking hands, Miss Vigors appeared. She seized Gerard's hand and held it in both hers, to Janet's great amusement. She was the strong-minded and literary member of the sisterhood, and, like Gerard, helped Mr. Austen in the parish. She would have managed the world had she had her will.

'Fan is entirely spoilt. They let her have her way in everything,' she began, as she and the Clarvilles turned towards the

Cottages. 'Only think, Mr. Gerard, she begins to argue upon pre-Adamite and pre-diluvian matters with Mr. Harton, and he encourages her.'

Gerard laughed, saying Fan was Fan, and he supposed she must have her way.

At last he and his mother were alone, and they had still an hour or more before his mile's walk to the station. They had much to talk of when seated side by side on the couch opposite the window. The aspect of the Cottages was west, and they could just see the setting sun beyond the far-stretching fields, and through the trees of the wide-reaching park. On the left was a grove in which the nightingales were already beginning their wonderful song; for the evening was warm and spring well advanced. All the harmony of the bird-spheres swelled about that befriended spot, and, as Mrs. Clarville often said, nature had conspired with man to bless it. Her son once added, maliciously,

'But Mother Eve's progeny conspire to introduce the trail of the serpent.'

'You still get on with Mr. Aspenel, Gerard?' asked the anxious mother.

'I believe so; I do my best. He is too cautious either to praise or blame; but, when he finds any defalcation, he dismisses the offender. I had hard work to get him to raise my salary, but he has done so, and I begin to think myself as rich as he, with two hundred a-year and no particular anxiety.'

'He finds you of use, Gerard.'

'Perhaps so; but he will not make a cat's-paw either of you or me. He wants us to have an eye on the gipsies that are beginning to frequent Mr. Harton's land; but I can't meddle with them, and ventured to say that you only visited them occasionally in a philanthropic sort of way. He mentioned one known as Wandering Will, whose movements he was anxious to follow, and said that mischief was sure to

arise wherever he appeared. "As to that fool, Harton," he added, "he will be the means of getting us all robbed, if not murdered."'

'Brotherly love and not persecution is the best antidote to the poison he fears,' said Mrs. Clarville. 'I will do my best to instil it.'

'He asked me if I would accept a position in South America with a still increased salary, and I said I could not leave you, mother.'

'Oh, Gerard! Don't let me ruin your prospects. It will never do to offend Mr. Aspenel.'

'He was not offended, I hope; but he dismissed me——'

'Gerard!' interrupted Mrs. Clarville, alarmed.

'Not from his service, mother, but from his presence.'

'When did this take place?'

'Yesterday, and I have not seen him

since. But there are hundreds of his slaves ready to go to the world's end for money, so he can easily supply my place. Money is the "golden idol" that this our Nebuchadnezzar has set up; and his subjects are ready enough to fall down and worship it. I question if even the "three children" could be found to withstand the bait.'

'You have, my son!'

'For your sake, mother. But for you, perhaps I, too, should yield.'

Mrs. Clarville took Gerard's hand, and they sat a few moments silent, gazing through the leaf-encased window at the dying day. The picture of St. Augustine and his mother, Monica, might have represented the pair.

'Is this enormous wealth gathered honestly?' asked Mrs. Clarville. 'Are your hands clean?'

'Honestly as the merchant world counts it; that is to say, wealth somehow breeds

wealth, but it would be difficult to give an account of its accumulation. I who have to reckon up a portion of it day by day, should not like to know the history of each sovereign. But, happily, my hands are clean enough, unless the touch of the pen and ledger defile them, like pitch.'

Again there was silence. Mrs. Clarville broke it.

'I would rather you lost your situation than that you should be corrupted by gold.'

'No fear at present, dear mother. Two hundred a-year will not demoralise me.'

Gerard laughed merrily, and his mother caught the infection. There was a tap at the door.

'I am so glad to hear you laughing, and that you are here, Mr. Gerard. I have just come home unexpectedly, and find that tiresome Julietta out, and no fire anywhere.'

This was said by Miss Lilyton, who was

the youngest, weakest, and prettiest of Gerard's six allies. She had a drooping figure, flaxen hair, of which she was justly proud, since it had survived unscathed the wear and tear of youth, and a pale, interesting face.

'Let me help you,' exclaimed Gerard, starting to his feet. 'I constantly light my own fire, and Miranda can come and help also.'

'Oh, no, if you please, Mr. Gerard. Julietta is already jealous of Miranda, and she would leave me at once if she knew.'

'All right; I can manage it. I have a box of safety-matches in my pocket.'

In less than no time Gerard was on his knees before Miss Lilyton's tiny grate, and had soon kindled a cheerful flame. Julietta slunk in during the process, and he administered a lecture which he knew Miss Lilyton would fear to do, and departed.

Thus ended his holiday, and when he

returned to his mother he told her that she must look after Miss Lilyton, because she seemed worse than usual, and he knew not what the rector or the choir would do without her. She played the organ and helped with the choir during the week, when the organist, who was also schoolmaster, was otherwise engaged. Gerard was wont to say,

'You might travel the world over, and not find six more useful ladies than ours; only I wish they would not interfere with one another's work.'

At eight o'clock he hastily took some refreshment prepared by his mother for him, and, as the night was fine, he prevailed on her to walk with him to the station. Miranda followed, carrying pompously her mistress's mackintosh and the door-key. The moon was up, and looked brightly down upon the mother and son as they hastened on arm-in-arm. The nightingales were harmonising the moonlit twilight, and

all save they was in repose. Nature at rest calms the soul, and Gerard almost whispered to his mother, as if from fear of arousing her.

They skirted the park wall, went through the village, past the old church and schoolhouse, and into the country road. They reached the station just as the train dashed in. An embrace, a fervent 'God bless you!' and a 'Good-bye, Miranda,' and Gerard was off.

CHAPTER VII.

HIS DAUGHTERS' EDUCATION.

Several days elapsed before Mrs. Aspenel could speak to her husband concerning the desirability of sending Janet to school. He had remained in London two or three nights, and had brought friends, or, more properly, acquaintances, to the Park on the others. She broached the subject at breakfast, when Mr. Aspenel suddenly looked up from his paper and inquired if Mrs. Nunn were gone.

This ill-matched pair sat opposite each other in a delightful breakfast-room, he engrossed in some calculation induced by the shipping-news, she reading her letters.

He was, as usual, scrupulously got up, and, personally, at least, he was unobjectionable. Save for 'the ferrets,' as she called his eyes, he would have been even good-looking. She was decidedly handsome, and a stranger would have said, 'What a prosperous, happy couple!' But strangers always make mistakes. First impressions are delusive and hasty judgments unsound. At least, it is best to think twice in most cases.

'Mrs. Nunn left last week, and I wish to consult you on what it is best to do with your daughters. At their respective ages they cannot be left to the exclusive instruction of their nurse,' said Mrs. Aspenel.

She always spoke to her husband satirically; she could not help it. She neither knew nor cared whether he understood her manner or not, and he never gave sign of doing so.

'My daughters! Can't you teach them,

Mrs. Aspenel? You are very talented,' he replied, returning to the shipping interest.

'I! What will you propose next? I think Janet, at least, should be sent to school. She is beyond my control, and treats Bruce abominably. They are always squabbling.'

'Bruce! School!' repeated Mr. Aspenel, who had a habit of saying over the last words of the person to whom he was speaking, while his mind was intent on its own particular problem.

'Yes; Bruce will do better without Janet, and she may perhaps be controlled at school.'

'But schools are so expensive. Some run you up bills of a couple of hundred pounds. I could not afford it, I have had so many losses lately. I may be on the verge of ruin.'

'Then it might be wise to give your daughters such an education as might enable them to support themselves. As

you are polite enough to consider me accomplished, I might also turn my talents to account.'

'Account! It is difficult to make up one's accounts, Mrs. Aspenel. Mine are so complicated that it is impossible to keep them distinct, and, although you will not believe it, I may be ruined any moment. I wanted to send young Clarville to look after my affairs in America, and he won't go. I call that ingratitude, seeing that both he and his mother owe everything to me.'

'A heavy debt, indeed, Mr. Aspenel! A nomination to a charitable institution that you do not support, and a clerkship that probably costs you little!'

'Two hundred a-year. And he declines to oblige me, because he can't leave his mother.'

'I hope Bruce may turn out as good a son, Mr. Aspenel. But what are we to do with Edith and Janet? I have written to

Lady Ascham, and she recommends several schools.'

Something like a smile passed over Mr. Aspenel's enigmatical face as he replied,'

'Lady Ascham! She has a registry-office, hasn't she? What percentage does she get?'

'Really, Mr. Aspenel, you insult Lady Ascham. She is very philanthropic, and interests herself in finding situations and canvassing for votes for all sorts of people. She knows all the institutions and schools, both at home and abroad.'

'Depend upon it, she doesn't work for nothing. Nobody does. But she needn't expect a percentage from me, since I am not to be taken in. The aristocracy are just as fond of money as the rest of us, and go into trade, or drive coaches and omnibuses, or keep cabs and job them, or do anything to hold them above water. You would be surprised at the applications I have from them for positions that

they could not fill. But I am wide awake.'

Mrs. Aspenel laughed satirically.

'In business, perhaps, but not at home,' she said.

'Which school does Lady Ascham recommend?' he asked.

'Here are the prospectuses she has sent me,' she replied, passing a heap of papers across the table.

'I will look them over, Mrs. Aspenel. It might not cost much more to send Janet to school than to keep a governess at home.'

'You must do both; for Edith's education is not finished, and Bruce must be taught.'

'I cannot be bored by another governess, always complaining and wanting an increase of salary. Why can't Edith have lessons of the old ladies at the Aspenel Homes? They are all highly educated, and would be glad of an extra pound or so. There is Miss Lilyton for music, Mrs. Vigors

for general literature, Mrs. Clarville for languages, and——'

Mr. Aspenel's calculations were arrested by a laugh so unaffected that he looked at his wife in astonishment. Natural laughter was not her tendency.

'Poor Edith!' she exclaimed. 'Miss Short might teach her how to use a walking-stick, and Mrs. Lucy give her lessons in deportment.'

'Precisely. Will you settle it? I dare-say twenty pounds a-year would cover it all; and money is a consideration just now, when one's ships are going to pieces like cartridge-paper. What with the storms and the shocks of earthquake, and the tidal wave, and one confounded thing and another, there's no calculating either distance or atmosphere. A fog comes on, and an ironclad goes down, and with it one of one's own vessels. I don't see what use the weather forecasts are, when one's ships are in mid-ocean. You may laugh, Mrs.

Aspenel, but these are serious times—very serious times.'

'Providence circumvents plans. Still, a few hundred thousands would not be of much moment to you, who have millions at your disposal.'

'Millions! Where did you pick up that notion? Why, the times are so bad that we may soon be without a house over our heads. I assure you the failures are enormous, and my speculation in West Indian sugar-plantations has been worse than a loss. Those rascally Germans, with their beetroot sugar, undersell and ruin us.'

'Ah, I hear there are great complaints against the influx of Germans in London and elsewhere.'

'Capital fellows! They work for next to nothing, and live on less than that. If Clarville doesn't take care—and you may tell his mother so—he will be superseded by a German, who won't want his salary raised.'

'You will let me know about the school, Mr. Aspenel; for there is no time to lose, if your daughters are to be made fit for their station in life.'

'Station! Ah, to be sure. I will look over these; but you can settle with the old ladies about Edith. She is better at home.'

If there was a vulnerable part in Mr. Aspenel's gold-encased heart, his daughter Edith had found it. His wife knew this, and, with that strange inconsistency attributed to human nature, was jealous of it—jealous on her own and her boy's account. While her husband was gathering up the prospectuses, she cast another arrow at him.

'Is Bruce also to be consigned to the old ladies?'

'I should think you could teach him for the present, Mrs. Aspenel—until, at least, I am more at ease concerning my foreign investments.'

'From India to Peru, Mr. Aspenel?'

'Just so; or from Australia to Chili. As soon as Harton's son Tom returns from abroad, I think of asking him to undertake Bruce. He wouldn't charge much, and would be glad of a little help. His father's going to the dogs.'

Further discussion was cut short by Mr. Aspenel glancing at his watch, and finding himself five minutes late. He bustled off with a hasty 'Good-morning, Mrs. Aspenel,' and left that lady to her thoughts. She did not indulge in them long, however, but went to her morning-room, and bade her maid summon Edith.

'What have you been doing, Edith?' was Janet's exclamation when the summons reached the school-room.

'You stopped out too late last night. Mammy said so,' shouted Bruce.

'We weren't out last night, you story-teller,' said Janet, following Edith from the room, and detaining her in the passage

with the following cautions :—'Hold your own, Edith. Don't be a white mouse any longer. Say you're nearly grown up and want finishing-masters. Say I must have lessons in painting, and am ready to go to school. Say we will both go to the same school. Say——'

'Dear Janet, I pray to say what is right. I have learnt this from Nurse True. But I have done nothing wrong and have nothing to fear.'

'But she never sends for us at this hour, Edith, and it is a shame you don't breakfast with her and—papa.'

Mrs. Aspenel soon quieted Edith's mind by telling her what her father had said concerning her education. She had a malicious pleasure in this, for she could never rouse the girl to cast a stone at her father. She was, however, deceived in her notion that she would give annoyance.

'What do you say to your finishing-mistresses, Edith?' she asked, with her

mocking laugh, which always grated on the nerves of the delicate girl.

'I should like them better than masters,' replied Edith, smiling as she thought of Janet's injunctions.

'You would like to be taught by those rusty pieces of machinery?'

'I would rather not leave home, and, as papa objects to another governess, I might pick up learning enough from the ladies, if they would undertake me. They have all been teachers in their youth except Mrs. Clarville and Miss Lorne. But they will not like to begin again.'

'Why do you prefer so doubtful and desultory an education to a school?'

'Because I could not leave Nurse True. And I might, perhaps, in time, be of use to papa, and to you and Bruce.'

'Thank you, Edith, for including us. Even the last dregs of sympathy are welcome when the full cup is denied one.'

'I wish I could be of any use. Indeed,

I should dearly like to love you if you would let me.'

Edith spoke these words timidly, for she was afraid of her step-mother, but she had long been waiting an opportunity to say them, and now they came. She had not realised that there are many people who resist the encroachments of love until no further inroads can be attempted; some from pride, others from coldness, all from lack of sympathy. In Mrs. Aspenel's case, however, these encroachments had not hitherto been attempted, and they came upon her with surprise. She believed Edith to be hypocritical in making them, and put her to the test.

'If you are sincere in what you say, you will undertake Bruce's education till Mr. Tom Harton returns from his tutor-tour. He will not learn of me.'

'I would do my very best. If only I could please papa, and be of some use to

you, I should be quite happy—at least, if Janet were happy.'

Mrs. Aspenel was silent a minute, and looked at Edith with some surprise. She still misdoubted her. She had a suspicious nature, and the circumstances of her married life tended to foster it. She did not believe it possible that any girl approaching womanhood could be satisfied with the life she led. She asked, therefore,

'What do you expect from this self-sacrifice?'

'I do not quite understand you,' was the reply. 'I should not be separated from Nurse True, who has been with me all my life. I would try to win Bruce's and your love, and to help papa. I should still visit the poor people, and teach in the school. The animals and birds would not miss their little treats, and my dog True and my dove would not pine after me. I am happier here than I should be at any

school, and it might amuse our ladies to help me, as Miss Vigors helps Fan.'

Edith always called the inmates of the Cottages 'our ladies.' She had an instinctive dislike to 'the old ladies' and 'the old maids,' as employed by others.

'I wish you could talk over this matter with your father as you are doing with me, Edith,' said Mrs. Aspenel, with a voice out of which had died all sarcasm and asperity.

'I should be afraid. Still, it is wrong to fear one's own father,' replied Edith, going close to Mrs. Aspenel, attracted by the voice.

'You might, perhaps, soften him, and prove that there are better things in life than gold.'

'My mother tried, and failed. But, as Nurse True says, God can bring to nought the treasures of this world, and open the soul to receive those of another and a better.'

As she spoke, Edith bent over Mrs. Aspenel, and kissed her forehead. This involuntary action touched her feelings. The cold kiss night and morning impressed on her cheek by her step-children had been all the signs of affection hitherto interchanged; and this spontaneous act, and the pressure of a small hand on her shoulder, she felt to be genuine.

'I am not so hard-hearted as you think me, Edith,' she said. 'But Janet exasperates me, and, between her and your father, I know not how to endure the life I lead. I should end it, but for Bruce.'

'Oh! Mrs. Aspenel.'

'I do not mean that I should destroy myself, but——' Mrs. Aspenel paused, then added: 'Thank you for the first sympathetic word I have heard since I married your father.'

Again Edith kissed the forehead, and felt a slight quiver run through the shoulder which her hand pressed. It was tran-

sitory, and the old satirical manner returned when Mrs. Aspenel spoke again.

'We will ask the old ladies to tea, and see what they think of your father's original plan. Suppose you all walk down with the invitation this afternoon, for to-morrow. They are not so overdone with engagements as to object to short notice. Five o'clock, of course. You might sound Mrs. Clarville. If her son chance to be with her, tell her to bring him. What dissipation for Janet! Five calls in one day!'

'We shall all like to go,' said Edith, and she returned to the school-room.

CHAPTER VIII.

A GOOD GIRL.

The ladies from the Cottages accepted Mrs. Aspenel's invitation. They all arrived separately. There was no *esprit de corps* amongst them, and they took some pride in being independent of one another: and what is independence, if it is not to have a house of one's own, which each of them had? Mrs. Aspenel, who was by nature hospitable, had provided something more than a five-o'clock tea for them, and they partook of a substantial meal. Unfortunately, Gerard was not at the Cottages, but the rector answered Mrs. Aspenel's summons, and joined them; so that they

were not quite doomed to female gossip. He, like them, dined early, and rejoiced in cold chicken and pigeon pie when he could get it; so did Edith and Janet, to say nothing of Bruce, who made a second male ingredient in what Janet called *le pâté aux femmes.*

Edith had hinted to Mrs. Clarville the plan for her education, and that lady had judiciously sounded her fellow 'cottagers.' All were quite excited at the chance of turning an honest penny and the prospect of the honour in store for them; all save Mrs. Clarville herself, who foresaw disagreeable complications, and thought the idea absurd.

When the tea was over, and the party adjourned to the drawing-room, Mrs. Aspenel broached the subject. The fact was, she said, that her husband would not part with Edith; indeed, none of them could do without her. At this assertion Edith looked at her step-mother in astonishment,

and Janet covered her mouth to suppress a laugh.

'Mr. Aspenel thinks,' pursued Mrs. Aspenel, 'that with so many clever ladies at hand, Edith might be educated at home, and that, if she could receive lessons from you in the branches in which you excel, she might remain at the Park while Janet goes to school.'

'I should be most happy to impart such knowledge as I possess to one who endears herself to me as she does to everyone,' said strong-minded Miss Vigors, holding out her hand patronisingly to Edith. 'Fan only reads with me occasionally, and Miss Aspenel might come on alternate days.'

'It would be jolly to learn with Fan,' put in irrepressible Janet.

'I am afraid my style is old-fashioned,' remarked humble Miss Lilyton. 'My school, both in music and singing, was the Italian; and now nothing but German goes

down. But I suppose the rules and rudiments are always the same.'

'Why, you understand music from beginning to end, tonic solfa and all,' said Mr. Austen.

'And she plays and sings beautifully,' ventured Edith.

'Old Lucas said the other day Miss Lilyton had the prettiest pipe in the village,' put in Janet, demurely, at which the performer blushed.

'I'm afraid I'm past work. One can't settle to teaching at eighty,' said Miss Short, 'but I hope the dear child will look in upon me and Nurse Sampson, as she has been used to do.'

Everybody laughed, for Sampson was a huge Persian cat, with a tail of abnormal size.

'And on me,' said sentimental Mrs. Lucy. 'I should be delighted to help her with her embroidery; but perhaps Mr. Aspenel might consider that waste of time?'

'And Mrs. Clarville?' asked Mrs. Aspenel, doubtfully.

'Edith knows that she can come to me whenever she likes; but I am too desultory a person myself to promise to give regular lessons—indeed, I should not know how to set about it.'

'I will undertake the divinity, and we will make a genius of you amongst us,' laughed Mr. Austen, who perceived that Mrs. Clarville was in some difficulty.

'We may do more for her, Mr. Austen, than all these colleges and high-schools could do,' said Miss Vigors, authoritatively. 'I do not believe in them. No individual teaching, and probing the mind, and exercising the judgment; but all superficial, just to get a degree. These modern innovations on time-honoured institutions make me ill. Cramming, and nothing else.'

'Poor Edith! poor Fan!' muttered Janet.

'You are all so kind,' said Edith, flitting

like a white butterfly from one old friend to another. 'If you will undertake me, I feel sure that I shall get on. Mrs. Nunn said I was beginning to improve when she left.'

Nothing conciliates so much as an interchange of benefits. It is cold work when they are all on one side. The ladies grew conversational and at home when they found that they could oblige those to whom they were under obligations, and, when Mrs. Aspenel said she would tell her husband of their willingness to oblige him, they displayed more of their natural manner than Mrs. Aspenel had ever seen before. Miss Vigors began to talk of the nobleman's family in which she had been so many years governess; Miss Lilyton of the organ of infinite stops she had once played; Mrs. Lucy of her ancestors; and Miss Short of the wonderful health and vigour she enjoyed at fourscore. Mrs. Clarville, with Bruce on her lap and a

girl on either side, did not join; but Mr. Austen, with proper clerical tact, made up for her reticence. As to Mrs. Aspenel, all her guests affirmed they had never seen her so agreeable before, and when they rose to take leave thanked her for 'a delightful afternoon.'

Just as this ceremonial was concluding, who should appear but the master of the mansion. He had returned earlier than usual, and his wife's manner, which was waxing cordial, suddenly relapsed into frigidity. He shook hands with the ladies —that is to say, their palms touched— and spoke to Mr. Austen with as much friendliness as he ever displayed.

'Another ironclad sunk. An emigrant ship. Have you seen the account? Frightful loss of money. It is on all the placards,' he said.

'What lives lost?' asked Mr. Austen.

'I was in a hurry and didn't stop to look,' replied Aspenel.

The ladies departed, and Janet and Bruce fled from the paternal presence. Mrs. Aspenel took Edith aside, and told her she must speak to her father, and make the best she could of the novel arrangement for her future education.

'I cannot, I dare not,' said Edith; but her step-mother gave her no choice, for she left her alone with her father when the rector took his leave.

He seemed unconscious of her presence, having taken a pocket-book from his pocket, and being instantly engaged with his accounts. She summoned courage to interrupt him. Some unflattering epithet rose to his lips, but stopped there when he perceived that it was Edith.

'Thank you, papa, for letting me remain at home,' she began, timidly. 'The ladies are quite willing to help me with my education, and I shall be delighted to do what I can for Bruce.'

'A good girl. You will save money, which gets scarcer every day. I suppose the old ladies won't charge anything,' said he.

'I think they will expect to be paid. But there will only be two, Miss Vigors and Miss Lilyton. I will ask them about it.'

'About it; no, you had better let it remain uncertain. What did Mrs. Clarville say?'

'I am sure she will help me, but she cannot undertake regular tuition.'

'Like mother, like son. An ungrateful couple.'

'Oh no, papa. They are excellent people. Everybody says so.'

'Everybody! ha, ha! What do you know about it? But I'm glad you are settled, as well as Janet and Bruce.'

'Have you decided for Janet, papa?'

'Yes, I've seen Mrs. Aspenel's universal

provider, Lady Ascham, and she recommends a school where they don't run you up such frightful bills as they do in some places. This is a French school; that is to say, the principals are French. "A gentleman and lady of the old noblesse," said Lady Ascham. As if that mattered, so long as they don't ruin one. But she didn't ask for a percentage, as I expected —indeed, still expect. People don't work for nothing in these days of competition.'

'I don't quite understand you, papa.'

'I daresay not. Women never do understand pounds, shillings, and pence, and that's why they ruin the men. My number three would soon ruin me if I would let her.'

When Mr. Aspenel was at his ease, he would occasionally affix numbers to his wives as a shorter and easier means of distinguishing them than the first, second, or third Mrs. Aspenel. This was one of his very few jokes, for he was not jocular.

'When is Janet to go, papa?' asked Edith, waxing bolder as her father grew communicative.

'The next term, as they call it; and, as she and her mother and brother don't get on, I have arranged for her to spend her holidays with this Monsieur and Madame de Belleville. They go to Paris most years, and will take her with them.'

'Oh, papa! Will she never come home?'

The despair in Edith's voice attracted her father's close attention. Looking at her, he perceived that her hands were clasped and that her face expressed absolute terror.

'Come home! Oh, yes, now and then, of course. We shall all do better without her. She wants more discipline than she has ever had from that foolish old woman Trueman. I should have sent her off, had I not promised your——Well, I promised to keep her, and I suppose I must.'

'She is our best and most faithful friend,' said Edith, whose pulses were quivering with the excitement caused by what she had heard. 'Perhaps I had better go now,' she added, fearing to give way before her father, who brooked no tears.

'Perhaps. Tell your mother—I mean Mrs. Aspenel—what I have arranged for Janet. She will be pleased, for once. Tell Miss Vigors that she must be particular in teaching you arithmetic thoroughly. Many a man is ruined because his family know nothing of £ s. d. I shall be, if we don't take care.'

'I hope not, papa. I will help you if I can. I wish to be of service to you.'

The 'ferrets' were turned sharply upon Edith, and when Mr. Aspenel perceived that she was really in earnest his face relaxed. It seemed usually strained to the uttermost, like a working machine.

'That is what your mother used to say.

But she was delicate, like you, and nothing came of it,' he said. 'Nobody is of use to me. I can only trust as far as I can see.'

Edith looked disappointed, and he muttered something about 'a good girl,' which raised a smile. She left him and went to Mrs. Aspenel. Bruce was with her. She told her what her father had done as briefly as she could, and it was evident that Mrs. Aspenel was delighted, while Bruce clapped his chubby hands, and cried, 'I'll tell Janet.' He was half-way up the stairs before the others knew what he was about, and in the school-room in no time.

'Let him alone,' said Mrs. Aspenel. 'He will only break the news, and Janet has not much feeling.'

'You do not know her, Mrs. Aspenel,' said Edith.

'I know a great deal too much of her, and shall be thankful when she is under proper government.'

'I will go to her, if you please,' said Edith.

'We will both go,' replied the step-mother.

To their amazement, they found Janet dancing round the room with Bruce, and Nurse True expostulating. Both were shouting 'Hurrah!' and appeared to be on the most amicable terms, and in uproarious spirits. When Janet perceived Mrs. Aspenel, she danced up to her, exclaiming,

'Is it true? Am I really going to school?'

'Oh, Janet!' sighed Edith.

'You will all be better without me. You know I am the plague of your lives. I shall learn painting, and have nobody to smudge my drawings. Bruce will torment somebody else——'

'Let us dance again, Janet,' interrupted Bruce, tugging at her skirts.

'You see, he doesn't hate me, after all, Mrs. Aspenel,' cried Janet. 'We quarrel

and make it up—don't we, Bruce? You'll have no playfellow, when I'm gone.'

'You are certainly very provoking, Janet,' said Mrs. Aspenel, leaving the room as suddenly as she had entered it.

Janet's spirits were soon calmed when she heard the actual state of the case, and that she might possibly be separated from Edith and Nurse True for a long time. She saw, besides, that Edith was very unhappy.

'You will have companions, I none,' said the latter.

'You will have the six juveniles at the Cottages, who are devoted to you, and Nurse True, and Bruce, and Fan,' returned Janet, telling them off on her fingers, 'and Cousin Gerard, who is worth them all. I wish I weren't going,' she added, throwing her arms round her sister, and beginning to cry.

'You have your wish, Miss Janet. Don't make Miss Edith miserable,' said Nurse

True. 'You must try to improve, for everybody's sake. It is better to learn than to idle, my dear; and I daresay this mounseer and madam will be kind. I only hope they ain't Papists, and that you won't come back Frenchified. I can't understand why English people want their children to be brought up French.'

'I don't care which I am, for my part,' said Janet, recovering her spirits. 'I'm not so proud of my parentage, and don't seem to have any ancestors.'

Nurse True was wise enough not to reply to this sally, and Janet began to question Edith closely as to what their father had said, Bruce listening with those long ears said to belong to little pitchers.

CHAPTER IX.

AN ASSAULT FRUSTRATED.

Before Janet was sent to school, Mrs. Aspenel managed to have an interview with Lady Ascham. She was only too glad of an excuse for a visit to London, and appointed a day to have luncheon with her friend in Belgravia, in order, as she expressed it, 'to talk over the matter on which Mr. Aspenel had consulted her.' These ladies corresponded chiefly on post-cards, for Lady Ascham was always too busy to fold a letter, place it in an envelope, and gum it down, and preferred being spared the trouble of opening and unfolding similar missives. Thus, they

sometimes found it difficult to throw a veil over their language, in order to make it invisible to the curious eyes of domestics. Not that such a veil is necessary now-a-days, since concealment is impossible where education is universal. We can no longer say, 'The best servant I ever had could neither read nor write,' but must change it to 'The best servant I ever had minded his own business.'

Lady Ascham was wont to enunciate this in the presence of her household, and, being indifferent to its opinion, found good results. Mr. Aspenel was not far wrong when he called her 'The Universal Provider,' quoting from an advertisement he was in the habit of seeing; for, as she sat awaiting Mrs. Aspenel, she might have been Secretary of State. She was a widow and childless, and employed her time, energy, and superfluous feelings for the good of the public. On the library table at which she sat, and on every other avail-

able chair and table, were scattered prospectuses, voting-papers, appeals, petitions, letters from every quarter of the globe, presentation copies of pamphlets concerning charitable institutions, reports of all known and unknown charities, and post-cards without end. Her face indicated the perplexity into which this philanthropic undertaking had cast her. Her forehead was much wrinkled, and she looked worn-out by the multiplicity of her self-imposed duties; for nothing accumulates like charity. The appellants have no compassion, and are like so many cormorants pouncing upon their prey. It must be confessed that Lady Ascham liked to be a victim, and nothing pleased her better than to sigh out her fatigue after a hard day's work to some sympathetic friend in such words as, 'I am really exhausted with the appeals I have had to-day. I have no time for private or personal affairs,' etc., etc.

'Always at it, Selina!' said Mrs. Aspenel, as she was ushered into her friend's presence.

'No diminution in my responsibilities, dear,' replied Lady Ascham, embracing her warmly. 'I was never so surprised in my life as by that visit from Mr. Aspenel. He was really quite agreeable, and amused me by saying that he might have to make an appeal soon on his own behalf, for he was on the verge of ruin.'

'He is always saying that. I should like to know something of the school he has chosen, for we don't quite want a Do-the-Girls Hall,' said Mrs. Aspenel.

'I have nothing of the kind on my books, Dorothea. But we will talk it over at luncheon, for I have not a moment to lose. I have a committee at three, and I am obliged just to look in at a charity concert afterwards, and in the evening there are the theatricals by the Roaming Roysterers, on behalf of the Home for—

I positively forget what at this moment, but an excellent institution.'

Mrs. Aspenel laughed. It was pleasant to see her show her white teeth, and reveal a dimple that was usually hidden. She seldom laughed when at home. Still, in spite of her grievances, she was a much more cheerful-looking woman than was her friend, who made her own grievances, if she had any, and looked pale, careworn, and anxious—years older than Mrs. Aspenel, who was about her age.

At luncheon she dismissed the man, and began at once upon the subject of Janet's school. Food, like everything else, gave way before work, and people wondered how she existed.

'The De Bellevilles are old friends of mine. Not teachers who want to be kept afloat, exactly, but refugees of the old noblesse. You understand, Dorothea. They don't pester me with prospectuses, but I send them a pupil when I can; for

"*il faut vivre*," as Monsieur De Belleville says, ironically. They take daily pupils, and have only three or four boarders, who live entirely with them, and have the benefit of their pure Parisian French. They have a vacancy just now, and I hope your—what shall I call her?—step-child may fill it.'

'Call her Janet. She is a very disagreeable girl, and quite unmanageable.'

'That is what I hear of all the girls, and boys too. I am told that they are men and women before their time, and parents obey them, thus reversing the commandment.'

'Mr. Aspenel's children are not exactly that, but they set their faces against me, and, now that their governess has left, I don't know what to do with them.'

'Perhaps you set your face against them, Dorothea. I remember you had always strong likes and dislikes. But Mr. Aspenel seemed to jump at the De Belle-

villes when I told him that a hundred a-year would cover all expenses.'

'I can quite imagine that. Where do they live?'

'At Clifton, in the Paragon, where, I believe, Hannah More lived—a good precedent. At least, people who want my nomination or recommendation make a point of telling me about the reputation of the place or people for a century back.'

Lady Ascham then proceeded to describe her foreign friends, and, had Mrs. Aspenel been really anxious about Janet, she would have been satisfied with the account. As it was, she thought the school would be as well as another. She did not, however, think it would be strict enough, and plied Lady Ascham with questions as to rules and discipline. Of these she knew nothing—indeed, she had not time to go into them, for her carriage drove up, and she exclaimed,

'I shall be late for the committee. Where can I drive you, Dorothea?'

'To Regent Street, if convenient.'

Lady Ascham suddenly bethought herself of her want of hospitality, and entreated her to remain until she returned from the committee, to go with her to the concert, stay to dinner, do any and everything, in short, save interfere with her engagements. Your busy people have no time for friendship. But Mrs. Aspenel declined. She had her own plans. She wanted to make the best of a brief afternoon by doing a vast amount of shopping and calling on several friends. Somewhat against her inclination, she had promised her husband to return home with him, therefore she had not much time. She accordingly got through her engagements as quickly as possible, in order to join him. Just as her cab drew up at his office in the City, a strange-looking man came out of it. He was ill-clad, and had a bold, defiant air; still he was handsome, and attracted her. Beneath his slouched wideawake glanced

piercing black eyes, and a bushy black beard and whiskers covered and concealed an oval, olive-complexioned face. As she was about to enter the huge, many-storeyed house, dignified by the name of office, or, more properly, offices, this man accosted her.

'You are Mrs. Aspenel; may I have a word with you?'

He accompanied her into the hall, and forcibly stopped her as she was about to mount the staircase, in the hope of escaping from him. Her husband's offices were on the first floor. The hall was dark, and, although she knew she was in the very centre of life, she was frightened.

'You needn't be alarmed,' said the man. 'It is of your husband I want to speak. If you have any influence with him, tell him that his life isn't worth a penny if he doesn't do what I say; neither is yours, for that matter. He doesn't care to see me starve and die—and—and—he has known

me all his life. Give me money or food, for pity's sake.'

'I have no influence with Mr. Aspenel, but here is money. Let me pass,' she said, producing her purse.

He seized it with the words, 'Tell him I have taken what he refused to give,' and, before she could utter either cry or remonstrance, was gone. Her fear was now heightened by the fact that she had lost not only her money but her railway-ticket; she ran upstairs, nevertheless, preferring rather to face her husband than to turn in pursuit of the robber. She found Gerard Clarville with Mr. Aspenel, and heard the words:

'That is the Wandering Will whom you and your mother object to looking after.'

'Is he the man I have just met?' she exclaimed, not noticing in her excitement that the men she saw before her were as flustered as she, and that the room was in confusion.

'Whom do you mean?' stammered her husband, whose hands trembled and whose voice shook audibly.

'An awful wretch, who told me to tell you that neither your life nor mine is worth a penny unless you comply with his demands; who snatched my purse from my hands, and said he had taken what you refused to give.'

'Give! Your purse! What was in it?' gasped Mr. Aspenel, recovering his strength.

'Not much; only my railway-ticket was there also.'

'Then you will be obliged to get another. Why did you let him have your purse?'

Gerard could not help smiling at the sudden transition from terror to greed. He had been at work in the next room, when he heard a scuffle and loud cry. He rushed into Mr. Aspenel's office, and found him struggling with the man who had

just left, and getting the worst of it. He separated them, but before he could seize on the assailant he was gone. He was about to pursue him, when Mr. Aspenel stopped him with a 'Let him go; he is not worth catching.'

The trio stood a moment looking at one another. Gerard spoke first.

'You should have let me run after him, sir. Once caught he wouldn't have needed watching. A thief in handcuffs is worth two on Roselands Common.'

'I want nothing public; but, if he threatens life and property, he must be watched—watched.'

'Get a detective. Set the police on him,' said Gerard.

'I must know my own affairs best, Mr. Clarville.'

Gerard felt himself snubbed, and was about to withdraw, when he perceived that Mrs. Aspenel, usually cold and self-pos-

sessed, looked pale and frightened still, and signed to him to remain.

'Would it not be well for Mr. Clarville to go with us to Roselands?' she asked, timidly, of her still more timid spouse. 'We hear of such terrible tragedies in railway carriages that one scarcely feels safe after that ruffian's intimidation.'

'Well, it might not be amiss. I suppose you have no engagement, Clarville? Your mother would be glad to see you. We could come up together to-morrow.'

'I shall be delighted, sir. Only I shall not be able to finish that extra work.'

'Never mind, for once. You can work later to-morrow. But we have lost the train. However, there is another in half-an-hour.'

Gerard said this would just give him time to run to his lodging and meet them at the station. His rooms were not very far from the office. They were snug,

decent apartments, and he was wont to argue with his friends who lived farther afield that he was better off than they were, since he had within reach 'forests of masts and the silvery Thames.' He certainly had good experience of human nature round about him, and, being energetic, he spent some of the scant leisure granted to him amongst the so-called 'dangerous classes.' He believed that it was every man's duty to help his neighbour to the extent of his ability, and was not of the opinion of the multitude that a philanthropist could not be a hero of romance just as well as the sentimental or sensational individual generally approved. But people are beginning to appreciate the self-denying efforts of the City clerk or curate who devotes himself to the good of his fellow-creatures, and is of much more use in his generation than monk or devotee.

So, when Gerard hurried to his first-floor

lodging in his 'close,' several workmen touched their hats to him, and when he entered the house his landlady received him with maternal effusion. The house was one of the relics of the past, and had been once an important mansion, just as the great warehouses which surrounded it had been, maybe, princely dwellings. But Gerard lived more in the present than the past, and considered a human soul of more value than all the bricks and mortar of a city that contains more bricks and mortar than has any other since the Creation. Thus his neighbours had, perhaps, a higher opinion of him than his patron and master, Mr. Aspenel.

Be that as it may, he gathered together one or two things that he wished to take to his mother, and left his somewhat untidy apartment to the care of Mrs. Pottle, his landlady, who, despite her name, had, as she expressed it, 'seen better days.'

While he was threading his way through

the ever-shifting crowds to London Bridge, Mrs. Pottle began to 'tidy up' his room, assisted by two juvenile Pottles, who hindered more than they helped.

'Bless his heart! how he do leave his things about!' she said. 'But all the men's alike; they just throw down a-purpose for the women to pick up. I, for one, should be a deal better without 'em. As well to be a maid-of-all-work.'

CHAPTER X.

A FIRST PARTING.

Mrs. Aspenel invited Gerard not only to dine but to sleep at the Park, and Mr. Aspenel seconded the invitation. He declined, however, and, when about to separate from them at the station, was surprised at their eagerness to drive him to the Cottages. Their carriage had been waiting some time, and the horses were impatient. He got in at once, and on the way home was minutely questioned by Mr. Aspenel as to the sleeping and other accommodation in his mother's small abode; for, said he, 'Each house was only intended

for one inmate and a servant, and it could never have entered the founder's mind that a male visitor could find either room or food. Forty pounds a-year is ample for one, but not enough for two.'

'Like the time-honoured goose,' laughed Gerard; 'when I arrive unexpectedly, as to-night, my mother and Miranda make me a shakedown on the sofa, in the sitting-room; but usually I sleep at the rectory, or sometimes at Hoplands. Mr. Austen is kind enough to say that he likes a visitor, and you know he always keeps open house.'

Mr. Aspenel frowned, and Gerard saw that he had talked too fast.

'If he can afford to keep open house he shouldn't complain if his tithes aren't paid,' said the former; then, arriving at the iron gates, he added, 'These Aspenel Homes are absurdly grand for places of charity. It would be more appropriate if they were built plain. Have an eye to Wandering Will, and tell your mother just enough to

convince her that she ought to look after him. I hear she preaches to the gipsies.'

He nodded as Gerard got out of the carriage, but Mrs. Aspenel gave him a warm hand-grasp.

'Come to the Park for me to-morrow precisely at 8.30,' shouted Mr. Aspenel after him; and Gerard thought to himself that he was expected to play policeman.

But he soon forgot all else in his mother's delighted welcome. He found her and Miranda together; for she was giving the girl her nightly lessons in reading and needlework, Miranda's education having been much neglected in the boat-cabin where she had been born and bred.

'Here's Mr. Clarville, missus. I knows his step,' cried excited Miranda, as he was ascending the stairs, and to whom a new face looked 'quite 'eavenly in that out-o'-the-way place,' as she was wont to say.

She nearly tumbled into his arms in her zeal to open the door, which his mother

did entirely when he was inside it. But maternal fears soon asserted themselves, and, 'Have you lost your situation?' was the first inquiry.

Gerard quieted them, and briefly detailed the events of the afternoon.

'I think I have seen the man,' said Mrs. Clarville; 'but he does not often come to these parts. I was at the camp to-day, and the gipsies were loud in their complaints of Mr. Aspenel's persecution, as they call it. Fan told me that Mr. Harton thinks he means to exterminate them. She was there this morning, and I am afraid her gipsy proclivities increase. They look upon her as one of them, and impose on her in many ways. She will never settle down, and Miss Vigors is in despair, because she cannot interest her in the books she wishes her to read.'

'I don't wonder,' laughed Gerard.

'Supper is served,' interrupted the conversation, as Miranda, with important

manner and glowing face, threw the door open.

'Where did she learn that?' asked Gerard.

'From Hopkins, who tells her how she managed when she used to live in good families,' laughed his mother.

Hopkins was Miss Short's devoted attendant.

Everything that the larder contained was placed on the table in the hall, and the feast was crowned by early radishes and mustard-and-cress from Mrs. Clarville's small garden.

'Miranda, you have been robbing your mistress,' said Gerard.

'There's a sight more a-coming up, sir,' replied Miranda, abashed at the reproof of her particular hero.

Nevertheless, she was off, unbidden, to prepare the shakedown, happy in any event that could change the even tenor of her day.

Mother and son sat up late, discussing Mr. Aspenel and the gipsies, and consulting what they could do to be of service on either side.

Gerard was at the Park punctually at the appointed hour. Mrs. Aspenel managed to see him during a brief interval. She appeared holding up a purse.

'This was returned to me last night,' she began. 'A gipsy lad gave it to one of the servants, saying I had lost it. He was off immediately. On opening it, I found that the money was all there, but the railway-ticket had been abstracted. Mr. Aspenel thinks it was probably used by the man who assaulted him to convey him in the same train as the one we came by. But for your presence, we might have seen more of him. I shall always be grateful to you. In the purse was this paper, with these words scrawled on it, "No robber, after all."'

Gerard's response was interrupted by

Janet, who came flying into the dining-room, followed by Bruce. Mrs. Aspenel looked displeased, but all she thought of was her cousin.

'I must say good-bye, Gerard,' she said. 'Perhaps I shan't see you again before I go to school. Do get out of the way, Bruce. You interrupt everything.' Bruce, in fact, managed to get before her, and to encircle Gerard's knees with his chubby arms. 'Good-bye, Gerard. Make haste. Here's papa,' she continued, tugging at Bruce, who would not be removed.

Gerard bent over the child to meet Janet, who offered her face for the cousinly kiss to which she was accustomed, when Mr. Aspenel came in.

'What is this?' he exclaimed.

'I am only saying good-bye to Cousin Gerard, and Bruce has come between us, as usual,' replied Janet, forgetting natural fear in the uncertain moment, and putting her arms round her cousin's neck.

'My clerk! Mother in the almshouses! I had forgotten the relationship,' muttered Mr. Aspenel. 'The carriage is waiting,' he added, and motioned to Gerard to precede him.

Gerard freed himself from the children, shook hands with Mrs. Aspenel, and went out. Janet, for the first time in her life, followed, and stood at the door to see the last of him. Bruce, of course, ran after her; despite their antagonism, she was his only companion.

'Good-bye, Gerard, good-bye!' she screamed, heedless of her father's frowning face, who looked on, wondering what could have brought wife and children from their breakfast-tables to meet his clerk. His clerk!

He made a mental resolve to invite him to the Park no more, and upbraided himself for his weakness in taking a connection of Number Two into his service.

'Why did you come down unsum-

moned?' asked Mrs. Aspenel, when the carriage had driven off.

'Because I wanted to wish Cousin Gerard good-bye. He is my best and dearest friend,' replied the girl.

'You are too old to throw your arms round young men's necks; and your father was displeased,' said Mrs. Aspenel, severely.

'He is my own cousin! I don't care!' flouted Janet.

'Naughty Janet! Wicked Janet!' cried Bruce, and Janet gave him a sisterly shove.

'There will be an end of this,' apostrophised Mrs. Aspenel, as Janet ran off, pursued by Bruce.

In fact, the end alluded to was imminent. Madame de Belleville consented to take Janet for the half-term, and to keep her through the holidays, if her 'parents' wished; so preparations were soon in progress.

She was in great spirits, which not even Edith's depression and the prospect of

parting from her could allay. To get away from home was elysium. Her step-mother positively forbade further leave-takings, and told Nurse True that she would have no village gossip concerning Miss Janet's education. Mrs. Clarville would naturally come to wish her good-bye, and there were no other neighbours sufficiently intimate to necessitate farewells. Mr. Austen she would see, of course. Accordingly, Nurse True did not take her charge outside the Park walls until she accompanied Janet to school.

On that eventful morning all was excitement in school-room and nursery. A first journey is an event in life, and Janet slept little the previous night and ate little at breakfast. Indeed, the quiet tears in Edith's eyes, which no sly application of handkerchief could get rid of, would have sufficed to destroy any appetite. Moreover, Bruce would not leave her for a moment, and declared he would not let

her go. He was more affectionate in her departure than in her companionship. She, too, felt some remorse when she remembered that she had not been a perfect sister to him.

'There is the carriage. You must go down and wish your papa good-bye,' said Nurse True.

'I am afraid,' responded Janet.

'I will go with you.'

'And me,' cried Edith and Bruce.

The trio crept to the breakfast-room, all more or less in awe of him whom they should have loved. Edith went in first.

'Janet is come to say good-bye, papa,' she said.

'Janet!' he repeated, glancing up from his papers, which he was hastily tying together with red tape. 'Good-bye, child. I hope you will take advantage of your chances of education. Nobody knows how soon you may have to turn them to account. Above all, learn French thorough-

ly; that carries you everywhere. Many men and women get clerkships through a knowledge of French and other modern languages. They are far more useful than Greek and Latin.'

Janet stood before her father dumbfoundered. She had never heard him say so much before.

'Speak,' whispered Edith.

'Yes, papa, I will learn everything I can; but I like painting best. I am very glad to go,' she said, with provoking nonchalance.

'I daresay. We are always glad of excuses for a change. Good-bye.'

He held out his thin hand, which she took coldly.

'Won't you kiss her, papa?' asked tearful Edith.

'Kiss her? Yes, if she wishes. But she must not strangle me, as she did Clarville. That was quite unnecessary.'

'No fear,' said Janet, presenting her cheek.

There was something in that round, blooming face which touched a parental spring somewhere. He stooped to kiss it, and his eyes had a spark of apparent feeling.

Janet saw it, and did, in spite of prohibition and previous fear, cast her arms round his neck, saying, in a choked voice,

'I wish I could love you, papa. I do indeed.'

There was no response. Mr. Aspenel hurried to his carriage, while his wife looked on wondering, and Edith sobbed out,

'How could you say that, Janet?'

There was no time to lose. The carriage that took Mr. Aspenel to the station was to return, and in the course of an hour convey Janet thither. They all went

upstairs to prepare, and the sisters were alone for a short space.

'What shall I do without you, my darling?' was all Edith could say.

'Better than with me; for I know I am very provoking,' sobbed Janet.

'I have not been as good to you as I ought, Janet. Our mother told me never to leave you, and now you are leaving me.'

'That is my fault. You have been better than best. But you will have True, and I—I shall have lots of people, and I mean to come home for the holidays by hook or by crook.'

She cast her arms about Edith, and the pair knew for the first time what the word 'parting' meant.

The real one came all too soon. Mrs. Aspenel, Edith, and Bruce accompanied Janet to the station. She was more annoyed than flattered by her step-mother's and brother's presence; she would have pre-

ferred Nurse True in the carriage, instead of in the rumble.

At the station were Mrs. Clarville, Mr. Austen, and Fan. The latter had come uninvited to see the last of Janet. She generally went where she pleased, whether her company were acceptable or not. Janet, who was brimming over with regretful affection for all her friends, embraced her with the rest.

'Be a good girl,' said Mr. Austen, with clerical propriety.

'I'll try,' returned Janet.

Up steamed the train, in went Nurse True and the sandwiches, and in hopped Janet like a bird. Her last embrace and last look were for Edith, whose white face and tearful eyes touched the hearts of her friends.

Mrs. Aspenel summoned her and Bruce to the carriage, saying they would go for a drive, and the breezes of May and the delightful lanes soothed Edith. Mrs.

Aspenel took advantage of the occasion to inform her that, now Janet was gone, certain changes must be made in the household arrangements.

'I did not like to propose that you should breakfast with your father and me always, and dine when there is no company, so long as Janet was at home,' she said. 'But as you are nearly grown up, and must be introduced in due course, and as you have no resident governess, you cannot continue to live entirely with Nurse True, however delightful she may be'

The last part of this speech was spoken ironically, and it roused Edith from the tearful absorption into which she had fallen, and from which Bruce, with child-like intuition, was using every effort to disturb her.

'Nurse True has been with me ever since I was born, and has supplied my own mother's place as well as she could,' she said, suppressing a rising sob.

'That may be; but she is scarcely companionable, I should think. You cannot object to be more with your father and me than with her. It will look better in the eyes of the world, if not in your own, that you should accept me as chaperone, instead of a domestic, estimable as she may be. I flatter myself that, in spite of stepmotherdom, I am at least as agreeable as Nurse True or those old ladies whom you so greatly rejoice in.'

Edith was astonished at this advance on Mrs. Aspenel's part, who had never said so much to her before. She felt that it was her duty to meet it briskly, but she had neither the will nor the power. All she could do was to sob out meekly that she would endeavour to act as Mrs. Aspenel wished, and would be ready to join her at the breakfast-table on the morrow.

CHAPTER XI.

SCHOOL.

Edith did not know what absolute loneliness meant until she found herself at tea with Bruce. Thanks to Mrs. Aspenel, she had got through the day tolerably well. That lady had told her that she would not expect her at dinner until she had mentioned the subject to her father, so she and Bruce were sole companions. No Janet; no Nurse True. How desolate it was! But solace came when she least expected it.

'I'll be a good boy, Edith, and learn all my lessons, if you'll let me sleep with you.

Ellen says I sha'n't, and I say I will—in Janet's bed, in your room,' said Bruce, a slice of bread-and-butter in one hand, a cup of milk in the other.

'You shall, if you will promise to love Janet,' replied Edith.

'I wish Janet was back, I do,' said Bruce, putting down the cup and rubbing his sleeve across his eyes. 'I want to play, I do.'

Up rose Edith and embraced Bruce, and then and there told Ellen, the under-nurse, that Master Bruce might sleep in her room for once, if Mrs. Aspenel had no objection. And thus it came to pass that Bruce occupied Janet's bed, instead of his own in Nurse True's room, and Edith was consoled.

Meanwhile, what of Janet? She had just reached her destination. After an enjoyable journey, much good advice from True, and all the excitement of expectation, she found herself at the door of a

good-sized house, which overlooked the Severn and its surrounding woods.

'This is much more beautiful than the Park!' she cried, enthusiastically, when Nurse True had rung the bell.

No sooner were they in the hall than out came the loveliest lady Janet had ever seen, so she thought; and she was not far wrong. She shook hands with Nurse True; kissed Janet on both cheeks; paid the cabman, told him to assist the maid in carrying up the luggage, and did it all so rapidly that even Nurse True was surprised. There was a foreign accent on the English, otherwise, Janet thought, with some disappointment, she need not have been a Frenchwoman at all.

'Still,' she argued to herself, 'I have never seen anyone like her.'

She was right. Madame de Belleville, at about forty, retained the beauty and vivacity of half that age. She was of medium height, stout, with that embon-

point characteristic of her countrywomen, round-faced, and clear complexioned. Her eyes were large and of that pure, transparent hazel which always emits a golden light; while they, and her somewhat wide mouth, seemed to be ever smiling together. Her hair was grey before its time, and she wore it in large, short curls, which became her well. It was surmounted by no cap, but drawn up to the crown and fastened by a tortoiseshell comb.

She took her new arrivals upstairs to a double-bedded room, and begged them to take off their things preparatory to tea. Nurse True demurred.

'I have made this apartment prepared for you both to-night. You will sleep here, madame, and when you leave to-morrow the dear child will be already reconciled to her new home, and will have made de acquaintance of her companion.'

Saying this, Madame de Belleville tapped Janet on the cheek, and left the room.

'Isn't she a love? isn't she a dear?' cried Janet.

'If only her teaching and example are as honest as her face, she certainly is,' replied Nurse True, reflectively. 'I had a prejudice, but it is half gone already.'

It was wholly gone before long. Madame soon re-appeared, and led them downstairs, talking all the while. She took them into a comfortable dining-room, where a gentleman and three young ladies were seated at tea.

'Here she is, *mon ami;* here she is, *mes enfans!*' she exclaimed, leading Janet, first to Monsieur de Belleville, and then to each of the girls.

'*Vous parlez Français? Non!*' Den you must be my *poing de côté* at table, till you speak *couramment.* What de English of dat, Lizzie?' said monsieur, shaking hands.

'Fluently, monsieur,' was the ready answer of a fair girl about Janet's age, who

received her with an air of patronage and looked her well over.

Several remarks passed in French, while madame seated Janet and Nurse True before an omelette and a haricot, cooked in true French fashion. These remarks were complimentary to Janet. She was considered very pretty, and, strange to say, exceedingly like madame. The girls talked freely in French, with true Parisian accent.

'She resembles you greatly, *ma mie*,' said monsieur, contemplating the newcomer with increased interest.

Monsieur de Belleville's English was far less perfect than his wife's, for, being also a teacher of his own language, and a lecturer therein, he made a conscience of speaking it to his pupils, and rarely indulged in—or aired, as it is now the custom to say—his English. He was a tall, thin, sallow, black-eyed, black-haired man, every inch a Frenchman, and every inch a gentleman. He was, as Lady Ascham

had said, 'of the old *noblesse*,' and he and his charming wife had a sorrowful story hidden down deep below the cranny whence issued their easy and pleasant manner. Mr. or Mrs. John Bull would not have finished off a long train of misfortunes so airily as did these strays of a revolution, but would probably have proclaimed their grievances by their countenances: while our new acquaintances either concealed, ignored, or forgot theirs.

As soon as the young ladies had finished their tea, they disappeared, to the great relief of the travellers, who felt uncomfortable beneath their scrutiny and foreign tongue. Janet knew enough of French to interpret some of their remarks, and understood when madame bade them be cautious. But she perceived that they were perfectly at ease.

'I will leave you to finish your repast,' said madame; and she and monsieur withdrew.

'It is not like a school. They won't be strict enough,' moralised Nurse True, while Janet made a fine tea.

'It is not a school, "only classes." I poked that out of Mrs. Aspenel,' said Janet. 'You weren't strict with me, old True!'

'Better if I had been, perhaps, my dear; but I couldn't find it in my heart to punish you poor motherless children.'

When they had finished tea, madame reappeared, and suggested that they should arrange Janet's wardrobe. Accordingly they went upstairs again. Just as they were entering their room, they were accosted by the fair girl called Lizzie.

'I can tell you what to do, for I am to sleep with you,' she said, unceremoniously preceding them. 'I gave up my bed for the night, and am to share Bella's. We sha'n't have too much room, but it will be great fun. This is your chest of drawers and washstand, near your bed, and these are mine. We have the wardrobe between

us. We must be tolerably tidy, but madame isn't too neat herself. The French never are, you know.'

Nurse True uplifted her hands, and exclaimed,

'Then who teaches you good habits, my dear?'

Lizzie, having learnt Nurse True's position, was slightly offended by this familiar question, and answered, curtly,

'Nobody. They come naturally to ladies.'

'Indeed they do not! I am very untidy; but perhaps I'm not a lady. I should have no habits at all, but for Nurse True,' said Janet.

'Aren't you one of the Aspenels of Aspenel Park? My mother knows your mother a little.'

'My dear mother is dead. The present Mrs. Aspenel is only my step-mother.'

'Never mind. 'Tis all the same. Aspenel is a good name, and a park's a park. My

name is Hazelwood. My father is Sir James Hazelwood, of Hazelwood Grange. There's the bell. We read and work an hour before we go to bed. French, of course; and sometimes monsieur reads to us.'

Miss Hazelwood ran off, and Nurse True began to arrange Janet's wardrobe. She bade her remark where each article was, so that she might 'keep her things tidy.'

'A place for everything, and everything in its place,' she said, with nursely acumen.

At half-past eight o'clock they were summoned to prayers. This comforted Nurse True. Two respectable-looking servants were present, and madame read them in English. Monsieur was not there. Janet felt more of amusement than devotion, because of madame's somewhat rapid reading and peculiar pronunciation; but, when she subsequently remarked upon

this to Nurse True, she was rebuked by that good woman.

'You will never forget to say your own prayers and read a chapter before you go to bed,' said True. 'If you promise me this, I shall be happy about you, for I am sure you will be kindly treated if you are good and obedient. I have put your Bible and prayer-book on your drawers, with dear Miss Aspenel's text-book. When you look at them, you will think of us.'

'I would rather not promise, dear old True, because I always break my promises; but I will try,' replied Janet, humbly.

'We will pray together to-night, my deary, and read in the Blessed Book, and that may help you to remember,' said True, taking the Bible, and opening it at her favourite book of Proverbs.

She read aloud the first nine verses of the twenty-second chapter, which called forth from Janet the satisfactory interruption of

'I'm sure you've done all you could to "train us up in the way we should go," and I'll do my best not to "depart from it" when I'm old; but that's a long way off, dear True.'

True shook her head, and Janet added, penitently, that she would try to begin at once. They knelt side by side in silent prayer, which the simple but wise woman concluded aloud by 'Our Father,' and 'The grace of our Lord.' Impressionable Janet was in tears, and flung herself into her good friend's arms, by which she was tenderly enfolded.

Nurse True was to leave by an early train the following morning, so she aroused Janet at break of day. Kind Madame de Belleville gave them a private breakfast, which enabled them to 'gather up the crumbs' of the last words, ever so significant. Janet had not believed that she could have felt so miserable as she did when the cab was announced, and madame

came, all smiles and promises, to wish Nurse True good-bye.

'I will be a mother to the child, be assured,' she said. 'I have one son of my own, and know what is maternity.'

'Thank you, madame,' replied True, as she released herself from clinging Janet, and got into her cab.

CHAPTER XII.

BRUCE'S TUTOR.

Mr. Tom Harton came home from his travels. He arrived a year or more after Janet went to school, and meanwhile Bruce had received a desultory education. Edith was strictly conscientious, and taught him to the best of her ability when not herself under tuition at the Cottages. He, with truly masculine inconstancy, clamoured for Janet, and, what with maternal indulgence and indomitable self-will, did not make much progress. However, it must be confessed that there was more peace in the domestic economy of the Park without Janet than there had been with her.

Mr. Tom Harton increased it fourfold. What terms Mr. Aspenel had made with him did not transpire, but he agreed to undertake Master Bruce's education while himself working for his degree at home. He resided at Hoplands with his father, while devoting his morning hours to Bruce; and a study was prepared for that juvenile autocrat, where, it was whispered, the tutor kept a rod in pickle. At any rate he succeeded in bringing the boy into subjection to himself, whatever the power he exercised, by way of indemnity, over his former instructors. But Tom Harton had a way of subjecting most people to himself. No one knew where lay his talent, but his father said it was in his own unconquerable will. Be that as it may, even Fan obeyed him, while she heartily disliked him.

He was the eldest son, and the only one who had displayed a taste for letters. He was somewhat of a pedant as well as a

scholar, and argued with his father until he silenced if he did not convince him. Mr. Harton preferred his literary jousts with Miss Vigors and the rector, but Tom was omnipotent, and put them all down. He was a reformer, besides, and disapproved of his father's easy ways, not only with his workpeople and servants, but with the gipsies and other vagrants. He was a favourite of Mr. Aspenel's, who would fain have had him as a clerk or factotum had he felt so disposed. He had good manners, good looks, and, before all, a good opinion of himself, which, when not conspicuous, carries weight with the ladies. It certainly did with Mrs. Aspenel. He had travelled a good deal as tutor, and his knowledge of the world made him an oracle at Roselands. He either was, or fancied himself, irresistible to the fair sex, and had a very flattering manner with all but Fan.

Sauntering one morning over Roselands Common, he saw that damsel hovering

about the gipsies' camp, attended, as usual, by her dogs. She was talking to an old woman who might have been her grandmother, so strange was the typical likeness between them. Several ragged urchins were squatting about, a couple of donkeys were browsing near, and a rough cur was impudently disputing territory with Fan's more aristocratic canine friends. Within a small low tent a couple of men were tinkering and making skewers, and beyond, near a cart, a woman was spreading out some clothes to dry.

Tom Harton drew near, unperceived at first, but Fan soon turned and faced him.

'This is Mrs. Lee, who is almost queen of the gipsies,' she said. 'She is of a very old family, Tom, and you are always talking about old families. Tell him about your family, Mrs. Lee. She thinks I must belong to the Hearns, because Clorandy, which was my mother's name, was a

Hearn. But the Hearns are not quite so old a family as the Lees.'

'Ours is too remote to be traced,' exclaimed Mrs. Lee, in excellent English, 'but I believe we are of the stock of Abraham. I'm told he lived in a tent.'

'I should think it time for you to dwell in stone walls at your age, and to find more suitable occupation for your descendants. Fan, come with me,' returned Tom, severely, glancing about him.

'I could no more die in a house than could my fathers before me. Smoke suffocates me; and I'll commit my soul to the natural elements, and leave my body in my tent, or I'll not die at all.'

Mrs. Lee stood with flashing eyes and arms akimbo. With many-coloured shawl and fantastic head-gear she looked like a sibyl, and Tom longed to place her on the oracle-giving tripod. But he said, sententiously,

'We must send the inspector to look

after these children. They ought to be at school. I daresay they can neither read nor write.'

At the word 'Inspector,' the boys took to their heels, and were half across the common in no time. Fan laughed, and Mrs. Lee drew herself up majestically.

'We are more learned than you think. I can draw your horoscope or tell your fortune by your palm. Let me try, my fine gentleman.'

'And be put in prison for your pains. The law is stringent now, Mrs. Lee.'

'Law is hard: so is Aspenel: so are you. Good-day, sir.' So saying, the gipsy woman drew her shawl about her and strode off in the direction of the boys.

'She doesn't know you are a Harton,' said Fan. They walked away together, she and Tom.

'Have you nothing to do at home, that you pass your time with the gipsies?' asked Tom. 'I should have thought that

a girl could have occupied herself more profitably in many ways. I believe you are taking lessons of Miss Vigors.'

'I don't understand them, but I do the gipsies. That is natural, since I am of their race. I try to find out my parentage.'

'Better leave that in doubt, unless you wish to rejoin them,' said Tom, coldly.

'Perhaps I do—who knows? But I love Sir, and would not leave him if I could help it. I wish Jack would come home. How far is it to America?'

'If you paid more attention to your geography, and less to gipsies, you would not ask such foolish questions. Of what use are you in the world, if you do nothing but wander about?'

'I am of some use. I help to make the beds, and mend Sir's stockings, and feed the poultry, and see to the dogs, and nurse Sir when he is ill, and make the tea, and do a lot more things. I really do try, Mr. Tom; but I am afraid I am a born gipsy,

and I shall never be good for much. Jack says I shall go and keep house for him. I think I might manage a wigwam.'

Further conversation was interrupted by the appearance of Mrs. Clarville and Edith. They were on their way to the encampment the others had left. Mrs. Clarville was taking Edith to see for herself the poor people whom her father was trying to exterminate. She had not met the Wandering Will whom Mr. Aspenel was anxious to find, and she and her son continued to do what they could for the gipsies.

'They are much to be pitied, but they must be educated,' said Tom Harton. 'They cannot evade the law much longer.'

But Fan managed to elude Tom, and was on the watch for Mrs. Clarville and Edith when they returned.

'Do you think they are so very wicked?' she asked, breaking in upon them from a neighbouring covert, where she had been

lying in ambush. 'Is it very bad to be a born gipsy, like me? Oh, I wish I were white and good, like you, Miss Aspenel!'

The girl was in a state of great excitement, and there were tears in her large black eyes.

'What have they been saying to you, Fan?' asked Mrs. Clarville; and Fan poured out her version of Tom's opinions.

'Everybody talks of the gipsies as if they weren't human beings, much less Christians,' she said, indignantly. 'But I'm a gipsy, and yet I'm a human being and a Christian.'

'But you are trained and educated, dear,' said Mrs. Clarville, kindly. 'The real gipsy, or Egyptian, as may be, has wandered so long, and had such curious ways, that he has passed out of the road to education, until he shuns it as an enemy. We who call ourselves Christians are much to blame for this state of things; but we are aroused at last, and, what with

Board-schools and everybody's wish to do good to somebody else, the gipsies are likely either to be rooted out or made like the rest of us.'

'I'm sure I hope they won't grow like Tom,' said Fan, reflectively. 'He scolds me for trying to look after my own people. But you and Mr. Clarville are very good to them, and they love you, if they sometimes laugh at you. I tell them they oughtn't to laugh, because you only preach to them for their good.'

'Why do they laugh at us, Fan?' asked Mrs. Clarville, restraining a laugh herself.

'I think I oughtn't to tell; but I will, if you will not tell again,' replied Fan, confidentially. 'They say that, with all your wisdom, you're not half as learned as they are; for you can only tell them what has happened already, and they can tell you what is to come to pass; for they believe in themselves and their predictions.'

'And is that all the good we have done them, Fan?' asked Mrs. Clarville, sadly.

'Oh, no. One thing that you teach them is, they say, far more wonderful than all their arts, because it tells of past and future, and of a world beyond the stars they pretend to prophesy by. This is the history of our Lord Jesus Christ.'

Fan spoke this solemnly, and bowed her head.

'If we have done only this, we have not utterly failed,' said Mrs. Clarville. 'But, if you believe this marvellous and mysterious story of the salvation of our fallen race, you may be of immense service to your people, as you call our wandering friends.'

'How?' asked Fan, suddenly standing still and facing Mrs. Clarville with hands outspread, eyes dilated, and lips apart.

'By studying well the Holy Scriptures yourself, and teaching them to the tribes who eschew both church and chapel.'

'I will!' cried Fan, casting up her hands, and uplifting her eyes in a way that in anyone else might have seemed theatrical.

'But, my dear child, you cannot undertake this great work without faith and prayer. We can do nothing of ourselves.'

'Will you teach me, ma'am? Mrs. Lee says you could convert the world. May I learn of you, instead of Miss Vigors, who only gives me hard books to read that aren't of any use—all about things that have happened long ago, while I want to know all that is going on now. I like the newspapers best, though they make me cry. Is not the world very, very sad?'

'It is. But each of us can help to make it less so.'

'How?' exclaimed both the young girls at once; for each in her different way was excited by what her friend was saying.

'First by doing our duty to God and

the relations and friends to whom we belong; secondly, to our neighbour.'

'I want to know what my duty is,' cried Fan, with an earnestness that startled Mrs. Clarville.

'Come to me to-morrow afternoon, and we will see what God's Word teaches us,' said Mrs. Clarville.

'May I come, too, dear auntie?' asked Edith.

'If Mrs. Aspenel has no objection.'

'She don't like me. She don't think me good enough for Miss Aspenel—I, a born gipsy,' said Fan, humbly.

They were at the gate of the Cottages, which was nearly opposite the Park gates, so they separated, Mrs. Clarville going to her small abode, the girls turning towards their homes.

'May I walk a little way with you, Miss Aspenel?' asked Fan.

Edith looked doubtfully at the dogs, and felt dubious about Fan.

'To heel, Rolf! to heel, Jack!' shouted Fan, and her faithful attendants slunk behind her. Then to Edith: 'I will run away the moment I see anyone; but I want to ask you something particular, Miss Aspenel.'

'Then we will take the side-path,' replied Edith; and, instead of the drive, they skirted the Park wall.

'If my mother, Clorandy, is still alive, and if I have a father, and if I should find them, and if they wanted me, ought I to go away with them, and leave Mr. Harton?' asked Fan, speaking rapidly.

Edith was taken by surprise, and could not answer at once. Fan began again—

'If your father was to lose all his money, and be an outcast, or a bankrupt, or whatever they call it, and if everyone was to forsake him, even Mrs. Aspenel, and he was left all alone in the world, would you stand by him and try to comfort him, even

though he isn't a very kind father, and nobody likes him?'

'I think—I hope I should, Fan,' replied Edith at last, slowly and reflectively.

'I thought you would say that,' continued Fan, a shadow passing over her features. 'But, if you had some one you loved very dearly far, far away, would you leave your father and run after him?'

'I hope not, Fan. But such a thing could never happen to me. I have no friends at a distance, except Janet, and she, you know, is at school.'

'If you had somebody you hated tormenting you all day long, would you run away from him? I suppose you don't hate Mrs. Aspenel, though I think Miss Janet does; but, if you did, would you run away from her?'

'I think not. I must do my duty to my father, and sister, and brother. Besides, I have Nurse True.'

Fan's countenance changed; it grew reflective. Then she said,

'Miss Janet isn't as good as you. She would like to run away. She told me so.'

'Oh! Fan, you are older than Janet, and should know better. She is very happy at school. She is making many friends, and monsieur and madame are very kind to her. She spent her holidays with them in Paris, and is to go for Christmas with her friend, Miss Hazelwood, to their place in the north. She sent us home a beautiful painting, which her master considers well done, and says she is working quite hard.'

'Then why doesn't she come home? What right has Mrs. Aspenel to keep her away from you? There is nothing but injustice in all the world!'

'Fan! you should not speak so. Good-bye; I think I must make haste home.'

'I beg your pardon, Miss Aspenel. I didn't mean to be rude. Mr. Tom says

I am rude, and that it is my gipsy blood. I think that is rude, don't you?'

'Very; but good-bye, Fan. We must try to do right, notwithstanding our temptations to do wrong.'

With which laconic truism Edith hurried off, leaving Fan in doubt whether she had offended her or not.

CHAPTER XIII.

UNE PETITE PARTIE CARRÉE.

When Edith reached the house, after she left Fan, she went to her kind friend and counsellor, Nurse True. She was much distressed at the hint concerning Janet's desire to 'run away,' and wondered how and when she could have made a confidante of Fan. Nurse True reassured her, as usual, by saying that Fan had probably imagined it, because people gossiped about her disagreements with her step-mother.

'At any rate, Miss Janet is safe now, deary,' she said. 'She will have no temptation to run away from those nice, kind people who keep the school. All I

fear is that she'll be as much spoilt by them as she was kept under by Mrs. Aspenel. As for poor Fan, she can no more help wandering than I can help sitting still. Her forbears were gipsies; mine were factory hands; and as the tree's bent so it lies. 'Tis like the sins o' the fathers. We inherit by nature, but are changed by grace.'

'I say, Edith, you must dress for dinner,' here broke in Bruce, whip in hand. 'I want to be naughty. Nurse True, I will be naughty.'

Edith, who dreaded all battles and disputes, ran to her room. Bruce, held in awe by his tutor, gave vent to his feelings when away from him, and Nurse True, as well as Mrs. Aspenel and Edith, had more than they could do to curb him. As to Edith, she was in a perpetual turmoil. Her shy, peace-loving nature was attacked on all sides. Since she had made one of the family-party at meals, her mind had

been constantly disturbed. She wanted to 'honour her father,' and love her step-mother; she tried to do it with all her strength, and was miserable because she failed. In all that great house the only one she could honour and love was Nurse True. And she was not yet clear-sighted enough to understand either her father or his wife. She did not realize that greed on one side and profusion on the other caused the disputes and bickerings to which she had become an unwilling listener, or that the awful craze for money was at the root. Money to save or money to spend—what is the difference, when the saving or spending is for mere personal gratification?

Edith was always glad when their trio became a quartette by the addition of a guest; for she was not relegated to the nursery or school-room for one visitor, but always for more. On this occasion, when she and Bruce descended together, she

found Mr. Tom Harton in the drawing-room. Bruce, who was in hilarious spirits, was subdued as by a spell; and Edith, in spite of her pleasure at seeing a guest, shrank back from the ultra-politeness and studied refinement of Fan's enemy. But Mrs. Aspenel, who liked him and was always agreeable in society, came in and saved Edith from the difficult duty of conversation. She took refuge with Bruce, who was seated demurely on the edge of a low ottoman, and listened to the polite and flattering speeches of her step-mother on the progress of that hopeful only son. Bruce listened too, and began to think himself quite a prodigy.

Mr. Aspenel was rather late, but when he arrived, spic and span, the conversation turned upon the state of the money-market until dinner was announced.

Here was no stint; for Mrs. Aspenel would entertain according to her state, saying, when her husband remonstrated,

'If you choose to bring people to dinner, I choose to feed them properly.'

The battle raged when the bills came in.

It was a *petite partie carrée*, and Edith was seated opposite Mr. Tom Harton. She was conscious that he was always looking at her, or seemed to be. He addressed her occasionally; but the talk flowed principally from him to Mrs. Aspenel. She answered when addressed, like any other good child, but, although in her seventeenth year, was too timid to originate a sentence. Mrs. Aspenel looked at her occasionally, as if she longed to say, 'How stupid you are, Edith!' But politeness forbade this manifestation of opinion. Her father was engrossed by his speculations and his dinner combined, and was almost as silent as she; but he made up for it when she and Mrs. Aspenel left the dining-room.

'What are we to do with those pests of creation, the gipsies?' he began. 'Your

father persists in letting them pitch their tents on his common, and my object is to root them out.'

'Send the School-Board inspector after them. Insist on the children being sent to school and the parents paying. Of course, if you can bring proof of robbery, or fortune-telling, or other misdemeanour, you can get rid of them. My father has been infatuated by them all his life, and now the girl my mother brought up rules him.'

'She was a gipsy, eh?' asked Mr. Aspenel.

'I suppose so. She has all their peculiarities, and also their Eastern appearance,' replied Harton.

'She is handsome enough for an Indian queen, much less a Cleopatra,' said Aspenel. 'I see her in church and meet her sometimes. But there seems no harm in her. What I want is to be rid of the tribe. Do you know anything of a fellow they call

Wandering Will, who prowls about sometimes? He is a bad lot, and I should like to get him sent abroad.'

'Certainly, Mr. Aspenel. I remember him when I was a boy. He was a clever fellow, and scarcely a born gipsy. My father used to say he must have had some education.'

'If your father had done his duty, he wouldn't be roaming about still. Where did you learn to make yourself so agreeable to the ladies?'

This sudden change of subject might have disconcerted a less self-possessed man than Tom Harton, and the sharp, inquisitive glance that accompanied the question would have been still more embarrassing; but Tom only smiled, and said blandly,

'Am I agreeable to them? I am glad. They always appear beyond the mark of an impecunious fellow like me, and I never bestow a thought on them after I have met them. My studies engross all my time.

But when in society I go with society. You and I are equally averse to loss of time, I think, Mr. Aspenel, though one must dine.'

'And pay for one's dinner. You would be astonished if you knew how expensive keeping up such a house as this is.'

'I can well imagine it. We must train Bruce to understand pounds, shillings, and pence thoroughly. That is a part of education too much neglected, Mr. Aspenel.'

'Neglected! You are right. And all for Latin, and Greek, and mathematics, and tomfooleries that will never make a fortune. But geography and modern languages—work him up in those, I beg you.'

Whatever was Mr. Aspenel's method of saving, Tom Harton remarked that it did not include wine. He drank freely—too freely, he thought. Harton was himself all but a teetotaller, so he was the better able to estimate the consumption of others. It rather pleased him to find that

Mr. Aspenel had a vulnerable point in his gold-encased character.

When they joined the ladies, Mrs. Aspenel was at the piano. She played and sang like an artist, and she had discovered that Tom Harton was musical.

'Edith, let us hear what the old ladies have taught you—if there is such a thing as an old lady—eh, Harton?' said Mr. Aspenel.

'Ladies, like wine, mellow by age, Mr. Aspenel. Certainly those at the Aspenel Homes must be extremely mellow.'

Tom Harton said this with an indescribable nonchalance which made Mrs. Aspenel laugh and Edith wonder.

'What do you think of them? What are they doing for you, Edith?' asked Mr. Aspenel.

'They are exceedingly kind. They are doing their best to teach me,' was the reply.

'Then let us hear results. In business

we judge by results. Which is the singing-mistress? If you can't sing in public, we must stop the supplies. I don't believe in giving something for nothing.'

'I will accompany you, Edith,' said Mrs. Aspenel. 'Miss Lilyton has really a good method, and must have been an accomplished teacher.'

Poor Edith was sadly nervous, but she did not dare to disobey her father. She had a singularly sweet and sympathetic voice, and timid Miss Lilyton understood both it and her, so she was making progress under her tuition. But she failed to do herself justice, in spite of the 'Bravo! charming!' of Tom Harton. However, she proved that she had a voice and was in good training; so her father was satisfied, and said,

'That isn't bad. The old ladies aren't to be despised, after all. But you won't make your fortune on the boards, if I should lose mine, which is only too likely.

Continental bourses flat, premium on gold of Buenos Ayres fell, and there's no knowing how soon I may be ruined.'

'Not much fear of that, I should say, Mr. Aspenel,' said the affectionate wife.

'What do you know about it, Mrs. Aspenel?' returned the loving husband.

When Tom Harton took his leave, he did not go straight home, but took the road that led to Roselands or Hoplands Common, as it was indifferently called. When he arrived at the encampment, it was about eleven o'clock. He took care to stand upon the outskirts of it, lest he should excite suspicion; but he need not have feared, for his plans, if he had any, were circumvented by his finding the population in repose.

The scene was picturesque. The dark sky, with its crescent moon and sparkling constellations, looked down on the gorse-clad common and its tiny village of low tents, sleeping donkeys, van, and carts. No human form was visible. There was

no midnight marauder bringing in stolen poultry or game, as he had hoped—no outlying guard keeping watch.

'The nineteenth-century gipsy is not what he used to be,' he muttered. 'He is simply inoffensive. But I must do something to please the millionaire; for has he not daughters?'

A cur suddenly dashed out from a tent and began to bark. He instantly walked off, taking the path that led through one of his father's copses to the back of his house. Hoplands was an old-fashioned place, half farm, half country-seat, and the outbuildings were large. Yard, drying-ground, and coach-house spoke of a former position superior to the present; but they were in bad repair, and Tom grumbled as he approached them with words to the effect that his father was letting his property go to rack and ruin.

As he emerged from the copse which flanked the house on one side, he saw the

figure of a man near the gate which led into the spacious yard. He was standing as if looking at the premises or at a large yew-tree which had stood for generations in the centre of the yard. He must have been unusually quiet, or Lion, the watch-dog, would have been aroused. Tom came upon him from behind, and laid his hand on his shoulder with the words,

'What may you be doing here at this time of night?'

'No harm. I am footsore, and resting by the gate before going by the copse to the common,' responded the man, with perfect coolness, turning and facing him.

The voices and the rustle now aroused Lion, who began to bark furiously. Tom quieted him by a few words. Lion, like Bruce and the Hoplands' household generally, instinctively obeyed Mr. Tom.

'I should say you were here for no good. I suppose you belong to the gipsy vagabonds on the common, and are on

your way to the encampment,' said Tom, trying to look under a slouched, brigand-like hat, which hid all the man's face, save his bushy beard.

'I do. I am on my way to the common. Thanks to Mr. Harton, the poor, persecuted fugitives from Asia and Africa are allowed breathing-space. Ever since the days of Tamerlane we have been wanderers, and doubtless are of the lost tribes of Israel. I am, if not *the* Wandering Jew, *a* wandering Jew.'

Tom was astonished at the effrontery and mocking tone of the man, as well as at his language. He spoke in good English, and with pure accent.

'Whether Jew or Gentile, you have no business here,' said Tom.

'Then, with your good pleasure, I will take my departure. I am the last person in the world to stay where I am not wanted. My versatile talents usually ensure me a welcome. You would scarcely

believe that I have been, as the song says,

> "In court, in camp, and grove;
> For love is heaven, and heaven is love."'

'You are an impudent vagabond,' said Tom.

'Not so. I am myself, as you are yourself. If I am a vagabond, you are one. I merely wander up the copse to the tents; you wander from the tents down the copse. *Vagare*, to wander, you know. Remark that I omit the unpolite epithet of "impudent." We are both scholars; but my lore embraces the heavens, yours grovels on the earth. Good-night.'

He waved his arms in a semi-circle towards the star-tessellated arch above, and then swept the ground as with a scythe. Before Tom could either reply or seize him, as he would fain have done, he was out of sight in the copse. Tom's impulse was to loosen Lion and send him after him; but he was a cautious soul, and

reflected that if Lion bit him he might feign hydrophobia, and he, not believing in Pasteur, would not know what to do with him. Therefore he went into the house, and left Lion to his rest.

He found his father and Fan waiting up for him.

'I couldn't get Fan to bed,' began Mr. Harton. 'She wants to know what you had for dinner, what the ladies had on, and how you all comported yourselves, generally and individually.'

'Indeed I do not, sir. You sat up, and I sat up with you; that was all,' said Fan.

'Well, what's the news? Are the tenants behaving better, and does the impoverished Aspenel mean to join the tithe agitation against Austen, and has he put down the gipsies?' asked Mr. Harton.

'Not the latter, certainly,' replied his son. 'I walked round the encampment, and found a peaceful colony asleep.'

'Spy!' interjected Fan.

'And then I came through the copse, and met with a suspicious-looking personage leaning on the back-gate. He could not have been there for lawful reasons at such an hour.'

'Why not?' asked Fan.

'How do you know he was a gipsy?' asked Mr. Harton.

Tom recounted the conversation word for word; for, amongst his manifold accomplishments, he had a remarkable memory.

'That must be Wandering Will back again,' said Mr. Harton, laughing heartily. 'I haven't seen him for years. He is a character worth studying, and you, as a student, should avail yourself of the opportunity. All sorts of things have been said of him. He has been a prince in disguise, roaming, like Haroun al Raschid, to see the world; a philosopher, like Diogenes, looking for truth, and not finding it; a swindler, like half our race, who has

swindled once too often; a madman, like the other half, who ought to be shut up; and a fool, like all of us together, who fancies he knows everything, and knows nothing. I used to think him more rogue than fool; for there's nothing he cannot do, and nothing he has not done.'

While Mr. Harton spoke, Fan's eyes seemed fastened upon him, and Tom watched her narrowly.

'You know something of this gentleman, Fan?' he said.

'I have heard of him, but I never saw him, Mr. Tom. I want to see him. Mrs. Lee has told me about him.'

'What! the old Tigress?' asked Mr. Harton.

'She says they call her Tigress because she loves her whelps,' replied Fan, indignantly. 'I think it wrong to give people nick-names. She is a very nice old lady.'

'Well done, Fan! She is a connection of Wandering Will's, I have heard; but

how I can't conceive, for he is a man of education, and she—well, Fan, I suppose a tigress can't be educated.'

'I don't know, sir; but they are very clever at the circuses.'

'As you have nothing more to wait up for, Fan, perhaps you had better go to bed,' said inexorable Tom.

She made an involuntary little face at him at which Mr. Harton laughed, kissed her benefactor, and withdrew.

The others soon followed, Tom muttering,

'Wandering Will! Wandering Will! That's the man Mr. Aspenel wants. I'll have him.'

CHAPTER XIV.

EDITH'S SCHOOLING.

EDITH'S education was strangely desultory, but as she was in earnest in pursuing it, and as her mistresses were equally in earnest in imparting what they knew, she did not do amiss. It was delightful to her to know that she gave new life to the inmates of the Cottages. They actually rubbed up the rusty iron of their lore, and took to all sorts of accomplishments in her service. The expected guerdon from her father was second to the gift she bestowed —she and Fan—for they both brightened up the lives of the good ladies. Edith spent the best part of her day with them,

and it might have made the cynical or satirical smile to watch her go from one flower-encircled door to another, to take her various lessons. But she saw nothing ridiculous in it. Her teachers were accomplished women, and each instructed her in the art she understood best. Neither she nor Fan had been thrown much with other girls, so they had not acquired the manners of the day. They did not call their friends 'Poor old thing!' which is the pitifully respectful epithet by which young people speak of their elders, or patronise them as if they had been born before the Eocene period, whatever that may be; or take the words out of their mouths because they were so 'awfully slow.' On the contrary, Edith was grateful to them—genuinely grateful, and reproved Fan when she sometimes grumbled at Miss Vivors' 'hard books.' These they managed to study together when fortunate chance permitted, and nothing pleased Miss Vigors more

than to deliver a lecture on some learned topic to the two girls, who were expected to take notes, and to give her a full, true, and particular account of it.

'People suppose, my dears, that because one is not certified one knows nothing thoroughly. A great mistake,' she said one day, as she sat, spectacles on nose, cap erect, and huge book before her, giving a history lesson. 'I hate cramming. One ounce of well-digested food is more nourishing to the body than one pound of ill-digested. And so with the mind. One thing at a time. History to-day, geography to-morrow, and so on.'

'I wish it was always geography,' sighed Fan. 'I should like to go all over the world.'

'And I to stay at home,' put in Edith.

They were a great contrast. Edith with her pale, fair, sweet, intellectual face, and small, delicate form; Fan with her russet cheeks, black, glittering eyes and hair, red

lips, and strongly-built figure; a greater contrast, indeed, than were Edith and Janet. But Janet was Fan's favourite, and she never tired of asking questions about her and her education. Edith discovered that Janet had never planned to run away, but had only said how much she should enjoy it, when Fan had suggested the charms of a roving life. That Janet should actually be chained to the desk, learning languages of native teachers, and pursuing the 'abstruse sciences,' as she called them in her letters, bewildered Fan, while it delighted Edith.

The sisters wrote once a week to one another, and the minute details on either side were quite a domestic diary, in which the ladies of the Cottages and the monsieur and madame of the Vale figured largely.

To return to Miss Vigors from this digression.

'I considered myself a traveller, my

dears, when I was young,' she said, 'for I went with a family to Boulogne. Now people go from Pole to Pole. Apropos of the Poles, Fan, what can you tell me about them?'

Fan, who was expecting a foreign episode, started.

'The Poles, Miss Vigors! Why, they are the ends of the great, big axle, on which the earth turns like a big wheel; but I never shall understand how the axle was pushed through, or how the earth runs round upon it, and we don't tumble off. Miss Aspenel says she does, but I don't.'

'The laws of gravitation——' began Miss Vigors, extending her hand, in which she held a paper-knife, when there came a tap at the door.

It was Mrs. Clarville, and both girls rose to give her an enthusiastic greeting, as they always did.

'I fancied your time was up, Miss

Vigors,' she said. 'I just looked in to arrest Fan before she goes home.'

'It is more than up,' said Fan, pulling out a small silver watch, a parting gift from her friend Jack. 'It is nearly a quarter-past twelve, instead of twelve; and Miss Aspenel ought to be at Miss Lilyton's at twelve.'

'Then you are kept in,' laughed Mrs. Clarville.

'When I once begin my historical lecture, I forget time. Young ladies, you are dismissed,' said Miss Vigors, who never forgot what she considered due to the scholastic scheme.

Fan put on her hat with alacrity, and went off with Mrs. Clarville, while Edith lingered to thank Miss Vigors for her painstaking lesson.

'It is a pleasure to teach you, my dear; but Fan!' Miss Vigors uplifted her hands significantly, while Edith busied herself in replacing the school-books beneath a

curtain in the passage, improvised to conceal them.

Miss Vigors' sitting-room resembled nothing if not a bazaar. Every available space was covered with ornaments, to which even her favourite authors gave way, and were relegated to a bookshelf on the small landing. 'Presents from my pupils, my dears. I, like her most gracious Majesty, our pattern Queen, have kept every gift I ever received, from childhood until now,' she would say. To which Edith would reply, 'How very nice of you, Miss Vigors;' and Fan, 'No wonder you've got so many, ma'am, for that must have been a long time ago.'

Edith hastened on to Miss Lilyton, who was seated at her piano, industriously practising the accompaniments to the exercises and songs she was teaching her. The piano and music-stand occupied much space; and Miss Lilyton's room was not as neat as it should be. It was strewn with

music, hymn-books, scores for the choir, and all the other accessories of village practice, for Miss Lilyton was the organist's right hand; indeed, people were so ill-natured as to say that not only she, but others of the 'old ladies,' as they were called by their neighbours, had an eye to the widowed rector.

But he knew better, though he and Mr. Harton would sometimes poke Miss Vigors and Miss Lilyton at one another, for they both loved a joke. Mrs. Lucy was not beyond suspicion; but nobody ventured to suggest Mrs. Clarville, who, having a grown-up son, was considered sufficiently provided for.

'Widowers, widows, and old maids are staple commodities at Roselands,' Tom Harton would say to Mrs. Aspenel, when wishing to be amusing, which he was not by nature, only satirical.

However, to see meek Miss Lilyton giving Edith her lesson, you would not have

supposed her capable of matrimonial aspirations; she was too much engrossed with her music. So was Edith, who loved both the art and her mistress too well to think of anything else while engaged with them. Fan once called them a Christmas rose and a snowdrop; and her illustration suited them.

Fan was engaged in serious conversation with Mrs. Clarville while the singing lesson went on. That lady had given much time to Fan of late, for she had discovered in her a strange spirit of restlessness, which she could not account for, and Fan would not.

Mrs. Clarville had undertaken the superintendence of the Sunday-school, in which Fan had a class that she managed remarkably well. Her pupils were devoted to her, and whatever Fan said was law. Of course she had her own irregular method of teaching, but she taught, and Mrs. Clarville did not interfere.

It was in connection with this class and in reference to a previous interview that Mrs. Clarville wished to speak to her. Fan had already poured out her heart to this friend, on the subject that had frightened Edith, and had received counsel that she did not seem inclined to follow. When they were seated in Mrs. Clarville's pretty room, Fan began :

'Sir says that he will fight Squire Aspenel to the death before the gipsies shall be expelled from the common. He has offered to pay for the children's schooling, and Mr. Tom is in a great way. I can't live any longer with Mr. Tom, ma'am. I shall run away, I know I shall.'

'Nonsense, Fan. You must stop and teach the gipsy children. If Mr. Harton will pay for them at the Board-school, and we can get them to Sunday-school, think what good we may do.'

'They're too wild and dirty. Tidy children won't learn with them. They've

no shoes and stockings, and wouldn't wear them if they had.'

'But, Fan, the inspector has been down upon them and caught them. If they do not go to school they will be fined, and, if they decamp, Mr. Aspenel will follow them up. They are liable to imprisonment for breaking the law, and he is resolved to root them out.'

'Horrid old miser! How did he manage to be Miss Aspenel's and Miss Janet's father? Now, I'm just like my fathers, and I suppose you are, ma'am. "Cat after kind," Mr. Tom says of me. But he isn't like Sir.'

Fan looked reflective; Mrs. Clarville laughed.

'Heredity is a difficult question, Fan; but, if you will help me and my son, we may perhaps be of use to your fathers, as you call the gipsies. Gerard is accustomed to meeting all sorts of people when he prowls about London to try to do good;

and you know he and I visit the encampment most weeks. To-morrow is Saturday, and he will be down, If you will come with us, we will try to persuade the children to come to Sunday-school, as a preliminary to Board-school; you can have them in your class. Once bring the young under Christian teaching, and they will tell their parents of Him who died to save them.'

'That's what I want to do. I must find my mother Clorandy, and ask her for my father, and give them the "glad tidings.' 'That's the meaning of "Gospel," Mr. Austen told me.'

Fan rose in her excitement, and stood before Mrs. Clarville.

'In God's good time, dear Fan, you may even do this. But first let us help our friends who are near us. Ask Mr. Harton if you may come with us to-morrow afternoon.'

'Mustn't tell Tom. He's like a weasel.

That's the same as a skunk which Jack killed, only it don't smell like those American beasts. Tom is always after me and pokes his nose into everybody's affairs. I'll manage to puzzle him to-morrow, though, and put him on another scent, while we go to the common. I'll say Mr. Aspenel has sent for him—oh! it won't be a story, ma'am, for he has—and he'd make his way through the earth, like that dreadful axle, straight to the Poles, for an Aspenel. How does the axle get through the earth, and what a big piece of iron it must be? I can't believe all that Miss Vigors tells us; and what's the use?'

This question was too deep for Mrs. Clarville, who, like Fan, found enough to do immediately round her, and never puzzled her brains over abstruse matters. She had, however, relaxed somewhat in her determination not to undertake Edith's coaching-up in languages; for she read and spoke French and German with her

whenever opportunity offered. But this was done with the proviso that no return should be made; for Mrs. Clarville had an independent spirit, albeit, poor lady she was living, as she herself expressed it, 'on charity.' These anomalies are curious, and occur turn where you will; but her pride resisted what it called being under an obligation to Mr. Aspenel. The founder of the 'Homes' had nothing to do either with him or his family; therefore she did not owe her house or annuity to him. Edith, who looked on her as a perfect woman, did not understand the root of her apparent generosity.

While she and Fan were still discoursing of the plans for the morrow, Edith appeared. She was in haste, for it was nearly the Park luncheon-time. She said she would return in the afternoon, and then she and Fan departed together. She did return in the afternoon, and found her friend ready for her. Mrs. Clarville, though a clever

linguist, was not a teacher, so the lesson was more conversational than theoretical; but they both enjoyed it. According to modern custom they discussed their English friends in French, and Janet and Gerard were their themes.

'I promised to go to Mrs. Lucy,' exclaimed Edith, in the midst of a maternal effusion. 'I am learning a wonderful embroidery stitch, which she says is hundreds of years old, but which has been reproduced at the School of Art.'

'Nothing new under the sun,' laughed Mrs. Clarville, and Edith proceeded to Mrs. Lucy.

No one knew exactly how Mrs. Lucy managed to keep up with her age in the High-Art school of needlework; but she did, and, it was shrewdly suspected, turned an honest penny—as many a richer woman does, to whom the sous is not a necessity—by supplying a certain shop with her work. Pride again! She did not confess

this, but preferred conversing on past generations of Lucys to her own praiseworthy exertions. For she owed the power of helping occasionally the poor around her to the sale of the beautiful and fanciful designs that grew beneath her fingers. Edith admired and imitated, and Mrs. Lucy, in her most lackadaisical voice, generally wound up her lesson by, 'My dear Miss Aspenel, you will soon surpass me.'

She and Edith might have been themselves mediæval as they sat over their embroidery in that small Elizabethan room; for Mrs. Lucy had managed to save such remnants of her former home as were stiffest and ugliest. She called it æsthetic and artistic, and prided herself on having nothing absolutely modern in her very small abode. A great display of blue ware hung between the family portraits, and the village carpenter had surpassed himself in certain shelves that surmounted the chimney-piece, and contained crockery-ware

enough for the use of all the Cottages. She endeavoured to educate Edith up to High-Art and High-Church; but, as Fan said, 'Miss Aspenel is too lowly for that sort of thing,' and she did not make much way.

However, obedient Edith made the best of her opportunities, and was quite happy so long as she was not separated from her old friends and Nurse True. Her scholastic day would not be finished without a visit to bedridden Miss Lorne and energetic Miss Short, both of whom welcomed her, as did their faithful attendants, as moonlight on the evening of their lives.

CHAPTER XV.

AT THE ENCAMPMENT.

Gerard always said, change of occupation is recreation, which his affectionate mother believed to be a proverb, whereas he made it out of his own head, as the children say. He could not always secure a half-holiday on Saturday, for Mr. Aspenel used many curious arts to deprive him and his other *employés* of it; but he managed to be at the encampment on this particular Saturday at about four o'clock. His mother and Fan were with him. The trio went into the midst of the gipsies, just as if it was a natural thing, and began to converse with them freely. Mrs. Lee, or the Tigress,

as she was called, was chief speaker, but such men and women as were 'at home' joined occasionally. Preparations for decamping appeared to be in progress, and there was an unusual stir when the visitors appeared. Children and dogs were numerous, as usual, and the scene was diversified by the return of certain members of the community, who had been abroad selling their wares. Men with skewers, pegs, or cane for chair-mending; women with baskets of all kinds of goods, and babies tightly shawled to their sides. They spoke to one another in a jargon incomprehensible to our friends, but having its origin in Romany, diluted and degraded by intermixture of the born gipsy with the travelling vagrant of less pretentious lineage. Indeed, the genuine gipsy is fast dying out of the land, and the Tigress was a true specimen of the vanishing race.

It was a clear September day. The air was bracing, the sun was not too hot, and

Gerard felt that it was a boon to breathe and feel. He thought of the multitudes he had left, crowding bridge, riverside, and wharf, and no longer wondered that his bare-footed, brightly-clad brothers and sisters preferred the breezy common and canvas tent to the close room and foggy atmosphere.

Mrs. Clarville was a frequent visitor to these poor people, and, thanks to the rector and Mr. Harton, seldom came unprovided with comforts for such as were sick; though the invalids were few. She managed, however, to enter, by stooping, into a low tent where a woman lay on a bed on the ground, with a week-old baby by her side, and to administer a small deed and word of comfort; but, as this was not the object of her visit, she did not remain long. Glancing into another tent, she fancied she saw a man at the further end, but she did not venture to intrude. The major part of her motley acquaintance were in view.

Having paved the way by this kindly act, she opened the campaign.

'We are old friends now, and I shouldn't advise you against your interest,' she began; 'but, since it is the law of the land that all children shall be educated, why don't you take advantage of your present situation, so near the Board-school, and send your children?'

'We want none of their eddication; we won't be beholden to them,' said the Tigress, extending her arm, and stamping her foot.

'We ain't got no money, ma'am,' put in a man, with a whining voice.

'Perhaps the money would be found for a week or so, just to make a trial,' continued Mrs. Clarville. 'Only think how much better it is to grow up with knowledge than without it. Such of you as can read confess that.'

'Yes; there's some truth in what you say, missus,' growled another itinerant,

who was no more of a gipsy than Mrs. Clarville herself.

Here Gerard broke in.

'Why, my friends, I shouldn't have a shirt to my back but for the three R's. You know what that means, Reading, Riting, and Rithmetic.' A laugh. 'In these days you haven't a chance without learning. You may as well go to jail or workhouse, if you don't know how to use what brains you have. Tents are pleasant, God's air is delightful; but railroads and fresh towns leave no space for tents, and the smoke from machinery blackens the pure air. By the time these boys are men, they won't find standing-room, unless they force their way through the throng by learning. Why, friends, you stand in their light by letting them run away from school.'

'Force us to school—force us to stone walls—force us to death in stifling smoke!' cried the Tigress, the crimson kerchief that covered her head trembling as she shook

it and her fist. 'Never! I'll die where I've lived, under God's heaven, with my grandchildren and great-grandchildren round me.'

'God's heaven canopies city as well as moor,' replied Gerard, reverently. 'Our Father cares for us everywhere, and we should show our gratitude by following Him. But how can we do that unless we learn the way? And how can we understand that unless we read it?'

Murmurs of 'True for you. I don't want to know the way. He speaks like a parson,' succeeded this effort, accompanied by whiffs of tobacco smoke.

One handsome young fellow stood up, however, and spoke out. He was the husband of the young woman in the tent, and both were of the old families of Lee and Boswell. He glanced deprecatingly at his grandmother, the Tigress, and addressed Mrs. Clarville.

'I'm all for learning, ma'am. I can

read a little myself. There's my eldest, turned five, and you may have him, if we stops on here. You've been kind to my wife and all of us. But I couldn't sell no skewers to-day, and where the money for the schooling's to come from, I can't tell.'

'Let him come to Sunday-school to-morrow,' cried Fan, seizing on the ragged urchin indicated by the father, who, himself, looked almost a youth; 'you needn't pay for that; and I'll give bullseyes and toffy and a halfpenny to every boy and girl that is in my class by half-past nine o'clock. Who'll come?'

'I will,' and 'I will,' and 'I will,' sounded on all sides, and every child of the encampment surrounded Fan.

'A miracle! a miracle!' were words that reached Gerard's ears, in the midst of the children's 'I wills.' He glanced in the direction whence they seemed to come, and saw a head peering through the opening of one of the tents. A slouched gipsy

hat enveloped it so efficiently that beyond a row of gleaming white teeth, just visible through a black, bushy beard, he discerned nothing of the said head. It was withdrawn when he looked towards it. He thought it strange, and resolved to see more of its owner, if possible. A fairer sight awaited him, however, for on the outskirts of the camp, just beyond this particular tent, stood Edith and Bruce, with Nurse True as chaperone. They had been attracted by Fan, and the 'I wills.'

'Let them all come to-morrow, Mrs. Lee,' said Fan, persuasively, facing the Tigress. 'I'll see they have fair play;' then she whispered something which the old woman alone could hear, and which took instantaneous effect.

'I'm conwerted! I'm conwerted!' she exclaimed. 'We'll stop and see the end on't. We won't move on to-morrow morning as we was to. We'll be here for your sermon, young mister, if you'll preach to

us. I always listens, and now I'm conwerted.'

This conversion had been effected by Fan's whispered finale—

'You can circumvent Squire Aspenel.'

Then she continued aloud,

'No child shall have bullseyes or halfpence who hasn't clean face and hands and feet—legs, I mean; because, if it should rain, your feet must get a little dirty. Nine o'clock sharp, remember.'

'Shall us have bullseyes and halfpennies if we goes to Board-school?' asked a youngster rolling about at Fan's feet.

'Perhaps; I'll ask. There's no knowing what you may get if you try.'

'More kicks than half-pence, maybe,' hissed a bystander.

'Learning is better than house and land,' came in a mocking tone from the man in the tent.

'We don't want houses or land; we only want the common, what's public pro-

perty, and the fresh air, and to be let alone,' responded a neighbour.

'And the learning, which is better,' put in Gerard, good-humouredly. 'Our friend over there has hit the right nail on the head. Some of you who say you can see into the future by means of the occult sciences, can't you prognosticate which of those children may be member of Parliament some of these days, and help to make the laws for the Egyptians? Who knows but your native country, Egypt, may belong to us before long?'

'Our ancestors were Asiatic,' came from the tent.

'No matter; we've lots of possessions in Asia,' replied Gerard.

A suppressed laugh from the tent was followed by an inroad upon it. Master Bruce suddenly escaped from True, broke through the encampment, and made for this particular tabernacle. He wanted to find out what was inside, and unceremoni-

ously penetrated the almost imperceptible opening.

'Oh, Mr. Gerard, will you fetch him out?' pleaded Edith, who had followed him, and stopped near Gerard.

Gerard hastened to the tent. Its owner was using bad language, and Bruce was evidently paying the penalty of his intrusion, for he was screaming lustily. He thrust open the curtains and crept in, striking his head against the tent-pole as he did so. He saw a man holding Master Bruce by the arm, and cuffing him soundly. 'You deserve it,' was on his lips; but Bruce in his efforts to escape had managed to throw off the brigand hat, and he recognised the man from whose grasp he had rescued Mr. Aspenel. He seized Bruce, and pushed him outside the tent, then faced the Wandering Will that his employer had bade him track.

'I have seen you before,' he said.

'Yes; you have had the best of it twice.

Beware the third time,' replied Will, nonchalantly. 'Your patron fears me too much to bring me to justice, so you had better let me alone. Mind your business of truckling to a miser and snivelling to unbelievers, and I'll mind mine. I'm a philosopher, and only want enough to eat. That was all I was after when your master and I came to blows. I'm neither murderer nor thief. I took the fine lady's purse, and availed myself of one shilling to buy a meal and her railway-ticket to come down here. Ha, ha, ha! I daresay he stormed at taking another. I saw you on guard, travelled with you, only I didn't go first-class. "He who steals my purse steals trash," said I with my namesake Will, and sent back the miser's gold. I mean to return the shilling when I get one. Tell him so, with my compliments, and that he'd better not send spies after me. I nearly strangled that imp of his. Better let me pass quietly, for I've the best of

it here, if I had the worst you know where.'

Before Gerard could find words to reply to this rhodomontade, the man fell upon all fours, crept from beneath the tent, and vanished.

Gerard, who was less nimble, though many years his junior, got out with an effort, and, glancing round, saw him scudding across the common.

'He's not to be caught,' said the Tigress, defiantly; and, as Gerard did not wish to catch him, he turned to look for Bruce, who was carried off in a contrary direction by his two guardians.

'Didn't he howl!' laughed Fan, approaching him. 'But we had better go now, before they all change their minds.'

Gerard agreed; for he was doubtful as to what course to pursue with regard to the fugitive. He went round to take leave of the gipsies.

'You'll come and preach to-morrow; for

I'm conwerted,' said the Tigress, her eyes flashing ominously.

'If the children are at school in the morning, you shall have a sermon in the afternoon,' said ready Fan.

But Gerard was uncertain. Wandering Will's speech had troubled him, and he began to fear that his friends the gipsies might be harbouring a criminal.

His mother came forward, and promised that she at least would visit them on the morrow, and then the trio departed.

Fan's curiosity concerning Gerard's encounter with the man in the tent was insatiable, but he thought it best not to gratify it. He evaded her questions, and she grew almost as fierce as the Tigress, declaring that she ought to know everything; for wasn't she 'a born gipsy, as Tom said?'

He and his mother left her at Hoplands and on their way to the Homes he consulted Mrs. Clarville as to what he ought

to do, having first recounted his adventure.

'I think you should be before Bruce in telling Mr. Aspenel,' she advised. 'The boy will complain to his mother, who will make the worst of it, and Mr. Aspenel will take out a summons for assault, and the gipsies will get into trouble, just as we may be softening them.'

Mrs. Clarville was of a sanguine, hopeful nature, and 'believed all things'—even in the conversion of a Mahommedan, much less a gipsy. Gerard's faith was scarcely less, only it was tempered by greater worldly wisdom. He believed it to be his duty to his employer, however, to tell him of this second episode of strife between an Aspenel and a vagrant, and turned into the Park instead of the Cottages.

He found Mr. Aspenel at home, and was ushered into his sanctum—if a room dedicated to Mammon can be called a sanctum. He was, as usual, surrounded by bills—always settling accounts. Gerard related

as briefly as he could what had occurred. Mr. Aspenel turned livid, whether with fear or rage Gerard knew not.

'Always haunting me! Prowling about! My life isn't safe,' he muttered. 'Tom Harton has just been here with a similar story. Better keep it close. Don't let it get abroad; but watch, watch. This is what I say to Harton—watch.'

The words recalled to Gerard irresistibly similar words in Holy Scripture, and the association was painful to him.

'If I knew who and why I should watch,' he said, 'I should do so on your account, sir; but I cannot work in the dark.'

'Those who work for me must do my bidding. I can find plenty of willing hands,' returned Mr. Aspenel. 'That man is my enemy, and my life and property are not safe. Return the shilling! A spendthrift vagrant such as he! That isn't likely.'

'But he returned the purse. If he is a

robber, and threatens your life, he should be brought to justice.'

'No, no. We must get rid of him secretly. I mean, send off the gipsies with whom he has fraternised at present. They shall go to prison if they don't obey the laws, and they won't send their children to school because they can't pay. I expect they will all have decamped to-morrow morning. Sunday is their day, because they have nothing else to do—no fairs and fortune-telling, no selling and buying. What a lot of time we lose—and time is money, you know—by this Sabbatarianism. But we're getting enlightened by degrees.'

'I thought you respected the Sabbath, sir.'

'So I do; of course I do. Only it comes in the way of business. Many a stroke of luck fails because the Stock Exchange and the shipping offices and the General Post Office are shut on Sundays.'

'But the managers and the clerks want rest, sir. The Day of Rest is a gracious institution of the great Creator. Can I do anything for you?'

'To-morrow, do you mean? Certainly, you can help me to get through this pile of work. Nobody will be the wiser.'

'I meant with regard to Wandering Will.'

This name recalled Mr. Aspenel from a momentary abstraction, and relieved Gerard from a sudden terror. He was always in fear lest his employer should want him to work on Sunday, and he should lose his situation by refusing.

'Wandering Will! Let him alone for the present. He is probably on the railway by this time. I wish he were——'

What he wished did not transpire; for a servant knocked at the door, and asked if Mr. Tom Harton could see him for a few minutes.

'Certainly. Bring him in here,' replied Mr. Aspenel, with alacrity; and Gerard withdrew, to be replaced by a more willing slave.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE GIPSIES AT SCHOOL.

Fan was at her post in the Sunday-school the following morning punctually at half-past nine. She had asked Edith the previous day to take her class, fearing that the children of the decent cottagers would rebel against learning with the gipsies. She had also consulted Mr. Austen on her plan of campaign, and he entered into it, albeit doubtful as to the propriety of bribing 'the young idea' into religion by means of bullseyes.

'They wouldn't come without them,' said Fan, and that argument was conclusive.

Certainly that very appetising temptation brought them—rags, clean faces, bare feet, and all. The other children looked on in astonished consternation as Fan marshalled her new class and placed them around her. Mrs. Clarville, as superintendent, bade them be good and quiet, and Mr. Austen welcomed them kindly. They were a shrewd lot of youngsters, and had not roamed the world without picking up bits of its wisdom; but their hearts were set on the loaves and fishes more than on the instruction they were to receive, and Fan knew this.

'You shall each have a bullseye and a lollipop and a halfpenny if you are good,' she whispered, when she was sure no one else was listening. 'But you must all kneel down like the other children, and listen to that lady and say "Our Father" after her.'

This when Mrs. Clarville opened the school with prayer. The black-eyed and

wide-awake gipsies did as they were bid, and knelt down by the form at which Fan placed them; but of the 'Our Father' they knew next to nothing. One, only, joined in that prayer so free to all, with a proud consciousness of superior knowledge. Another seemed to be acquainted with the tune of the hymn that followed the prayer, and hummed it amid the nods and reproofs of his companions. But these juvenile wanderers were not ill-behaved. Although their only education had been in the cleverest way to beg, their manners were superior to those of the ragged classes generally. Two or three of them had actually put on shoes, which Fan believed to be a concession on the part of their parents not to be disregarded. They had, indeed, been 'got up' with some idea of effect. When Fan placed the easiest lesson-books she could find into their hands, their thoughts again turned to the promised sweets, and she had much diffi-

culty in keeping their attention alive. But some of them were not quite ignorant of letters, and declared their capability of reading with much boldness.

'That's big O, and that's A, and that's c, a, t—cat,' echoed through the school-room; and poor Fan found her task even more difficult than she imagined.

She taught them the verse of a hymn; she told them a Bible story; she amused them, in short, until it was time for church; and then she kept them back while the other children filed off, and quietly presented them with the promised dole.

'Shall I make them go to church?' she whispered to Mrs. Clarville.

'Better not; you have done enough for one day,' replied that lady, passing the class with an approving smile.

'We'll go to school again to-morrow, we will,' said the children, their mouths full of bullseyes.

Fan marshalled them a little way down the village in the direction of the common, then watched them a moment as they scampered off towards the encampment. She did not see that her gift of halfpence resulted in many games of pitch and toss, as they slackened pace outside the village; nor hear their account of their various experiences when they reached their vagrant friends.

She was late for morning service, and was met by a disapproving frown from Tom. Mr. Harton, on the contrary, gave her an inquiring glance, and she managed to reply to it, unobserved by her enemy, by whispering, 'They all came. They'll go to-morrow.' After this she essayed to be reverent and attentive, for she was always occupied by a mental study and imitation of Edith, who sat opposite her in the chancel, and thought that, if she was only as fair and gentle and well-behaved as she, there would be no impediment in

the way of her getting to heaven. 'How to get to heaven,' was as much one of her problems, as how to serve her mother's relatives, the gipsies. Mr. Austen would make the abstruse subject clear on Sunday, but Tom would cast many clouds over it during the week, and assure her that she was 'too disobedient for anything.'

'Am I disobedient, sir?' Fan would say to Mr. Harton, with angry tears in her eyes.

'Not to me, Fan; but then you know Tom is *so good*,' he would reply, with an amused twinkle.

On this particular Sabbath she was especially tried by this all-absorbing question. She wanted to make all the gipsies good, that they might not be excluded from this happy region, and her thoughts wandered off from her mother, Clorandy, to the ragged urchins she had been seeking to reform. She wished she had brought them to church; she wished

she knew whether her mother were in heaven; she wondered if Tom would ever get there; she felt sure that Mr. Harton and Jack would, because they were so kind. Then she fell to thinking of other members of the congregation, settling their future according to their deserts, and finally fixed her eyes and thoughts on Mr. Aspenel.

No one in that sacred edifice was so devout as he, except perhaps Tom. Mr. Aspenel did precisely what Miss Vigors told Fan she should do—kept his eyes on his book, stood, knelt, and sat precisely at the proper moment, and joined both in the responses and singing. Fan had never spoken to him in her life, but she had watched him narrowly, and had heard people talking of him every day. What they said was certainly not in his favour, and she sometimes fancied that he had a queer way of looking up from his book without uplifting his eyelids. All this

puzzled her, and, when the Tigress talked of her 'conwersion,' she wondered if Mr. Aspenel was, after all, as good as the Tigress. Of course Fan ought to have been looking into her own soul instead of the spiritual condition of her neighbours; but she had not been very carefully educated, and her mind ran adrift. Does yours ever run the same way, gentle reader? Are you ever guilty of speculating on the state of the soul of some son of Mammon, or that of his richly-attired, defiant-looking wife, or innocent daughter? Then you will make excuses for Fan.

She made none for herself, for her mind was in a constant state of turmoil about her manifold sins of omission and commission, and, had it not been for Mrs. Clarville, she would often have been in an unnaturally depressed condition. She poured out her troubles to her whenever she had an opportunity, and was taught where alone she could find the way to heaven

over which she was puzzling. Mrs. Clarville never tired of pointing to the Scriptures as the only certain guide.

It got abroad, somehow, that her son, Gerard, was going to preach to the gipsies, and, much to his annoyance, his congregation was increased by outsiders. Country people taking their Sunday walk on the common often tarried awhile to listen, but, on this occasion, Tom Harton, Mrs. Aspenel, and Edith, as well as three of the ladies of the Cottages, stood on the outskirts of his camp. His mother and Fan were at his side, together with Miss Lilyton who was always ready to lead the singing; and these interlopers, as Gerard considered them, placed themselves in their vicinity.

'I had heard of your son's powers of eloquence, and was curious to listen to them,' said Mrs. Aspenel to Mrs. Clarville. 'I hope we shall not be in the way.'

'Not in ours, but your presence may interfere with the attention of the poor

people,' replied Mrs. Clarville. 'I hope you won't make Gerard nervous.'

'Oh! he always seems self-possessed,' put in Tom Harton, with a sort of sneer.

If Gerard was nervous he did not show it, and his more aristocratic audience must have been disappointed if they expected either a display of talent or a sermon. Neither was forthcoming. He began his little service by giving out one of Moody and Sankey's hymns familiar to the gipsies, and he and Miss Lilyton and Fan led it off. Book in hand, he went in amongst them, singing as he walked, and, as if reproached by his presence, the men and children who were lounging on the ground sprang to their feet singing vigorously. The women, always more piously disposed, were already attentive, and stood about with the Tigress as their centre. If you take religion to the backslider, the fallen, or the vagrant, they give you their attention sometimes out of politeness, sometimes

conviction; and Gerard knew his people and how to deal with them.

'He is very shy,' whispered Fan to Mrs. Clarville, as she perceived that he had no intention of returning to their vicinity, but placed himself at the other end of the encampment.

The gipsies followed him, and Tom Harton and all the ladies were left a solitary group. All but Fan, who was after him like a shot. What people chose to call his 'sermon,' was simply a familiar address, couched in such terms as his audience could understand, and took the form of a conversation. They responded, applauded, or condemned according as their feelings or consciences were aroused, and, as Gerard was bold in the truth, he did not hesitate to speak out. Mr. Austen had joined him once or twice, but it was found that 'the parson's choker' interfered with the success of the work. The gipsies, like hosts of other ne'er-do-weels, had a decided objec-

tion to the 'cloth.' Still, in the midst of an entreaty that they would 'Seek the Lord before it was too late, and let their children learn of Him,' one man interrupted by 'Then we must send 'em to the parson's school. No 'spectors there. Haven't got no money, or mine should go for a week or so. 'Tisn't convenient to move on just now.'

'We'll have bullseyes and halfpence there,' shouted the children.

'Didn't I say that I was converted and that they should go,' broke in the Tigress, stamping her foot. 'Let the gentleman go on with his preachment.'

She and Fan had been holding a whispered conversation to the effect that Mr. Harton was still willing to help with the school-fees, which the Tigress concluded with the mysterious words, 'And we must stop here till we know that he who ran off yesterday is safe.'

By this time the interlopers had cauti-

ously skirted the encampment, and were standing near the speakers. Perceiving this, Gerard gave out another hymn, and even the cynical Tom and the high-spirited Mrs. Aspenel were surprised at the volume of song that succeeded.

'I am trusting, Lord, in Thee,
Blessed Lamb of Calvary,'

rang out upon the autumnal air, and who shall say which was the most impressed, the millionaire's wife or the gipsy queen? Certain it is, that this and similar hymns have a great effect on those classes which can only be reached by a force external to the regulated religious services of any sect whatsoever.

A short but solemn prayer succeeded, asking for the blessing of the Almighty on the assembly, through that 'Lamb of Calvary' of whom they had sung. Most of the faces were covered by the hands, but such as came for curiosity saw a won-

derful sight. In the midst of a little crowd, all standing, Mrs. Lee, the so-called Tigress, was on her knees, her hands uplifted, her head bent low. Fan saw this, and, with some uncontrollable impulse, knelt down beside her.

'That is the way to heaven,' said excited Fan, when she rose.

'Through the wilds, through the wilderness; in the tempest, in the calm; under the tent, under the sky; that is the way, and we will tread it,' shouted the Tigress, making her way to Gerard and extending her hand. 'You, none of you believe it, but I'm converted. Henceforth I tell no more fortunes, no more lies. I change my life. Let us sing "Shall we gather at the river?"'

Gerard was startled but not convinced. He had seen many excited women at revivals, and had discovered that the Tigress was an actress as well as a fortune-teller;

still, he gave out the hymn she asked for, and far away over the common and high up in the air floated the words, 'River, silver river.'

CHAPTER XVII.

A SHIP LOST.

Fan seemed to be the person most likely to catch Wandering Will, if she chose. That very Sunday evening she met him, as she was returning alone from evening service.

She was alone, because Mr. Harton did not go to church of an evening, and Tom was dining at the Park. Most of her friends had remained behind for the choir practice, superintended by Miss Lilyton and Gerard, but she felt singularly restless, and thought she would go home to her ever-sympathising benefactor. As

she passed the big Board-school, which was closed, she heard herself called from the surrounding copse.

'Fan!'

She was so accustomed to the name that she did not pause to consider who uttered it, but involuntarily answered,

'Yes, who wants me?'

'I do,' was the reply, and she saw Wandering Will's head protruded above the hedge which divided the road from the adjoining pine wood. She was not in the least frightened, nor was she surprised at the man's freedom; indeed, nothing seemed either to frighten or surprise her.

'Hide yourself,' she whispered. 'I'm coming, so is somebody else,' for she heard footsteps in the lane.

A countryman passed her with a 'Good-night, Miss Fan,' to which she responded by a 'Good-night, Hawkins,' and, having waited till he was out of sight, she climbed a neighbouring high gate, and joined

Wandering Will, who was in hiding beneath the hedge.

'What do you want with me?' she asked, boldly, but in a suppressed voice.

'I want to make your personal and intimate acquaintance,' he replied. 'I know you by repute; I have seen you at a distance; I wish to meet you face to face.'

'That will do you no good, and you will be caught and imprisoned, if you don't take care. They say the police are after you,' she said.

'No fear; I have a hundred lives, and if, hydra-like, they take one, another will replace it. A sort of transmigration, Fan. I have already inhabited numerous tabernacles, and am perfect in the art of transformation. I know the world and its disguises, Fan, having well scoured it.'

'You talk a deal of nonsense. One can scour pots and pans, but not this dirty earth. What do you want with me?'

'I want you to keep an eye on that electric eel, Tom Harton.'

'I always have. That's only tit for tat, because he keeps an eye on me.'

'But I want you to find out and tell me all you can about Aspenel, the so-called squire, through Tom Harton, who we will call the electric eel.'

'Why must I do this, Mr. Wandering Will?'

'Because you are one of us, and I knew your mother, Clorandy, and I promised her, when she died, never to lose sight of you.'

'Then you have broken your promise; for she died when I was seven, and now I am nearly seventeen. The Tigress told me all about it.'

'And, when I was in foreign parts, she kept me informed of you, from time to time, when the tribe pitched their tents on Hoplands Common. I have not lost sight of you, Fan, and never shall.'

'That's a story; for you could not see me when you were in other parts of the world. I suppose you mean you heard of me.'

'Yes. You are sharp, Fan. You and I could make a fortune together. You are bolder, braver, handsomer even than your mother, Clorandy. I have always been on the point of making a fortune, but my fate has interfered. Aspenel has not half my talent or education, and see how rich he is.'

'But I would rather be you than he. You are free, and he is afraid of his shadow.'

'Afraid of me! Well said, Fan. I am his shadow, and will follow him whereso-ever he goeth. In spite of his plots and his millions, I will be after him; and, if you will help me, have the best of it. Gather up stores of honey against you see me. It may be in a month; it may be in a year; but we shall meet again. Re-

member, child, that, if you tire of the life you lead, and if the electric eel annoys you beyond your endurance, you can come to me. You belong to us. You are more mine than Mr. Harton's, though he has done better for you than I have. Perhaps I will tell you more when we meet again. My stars have been against me all my life, so says the Tigress.'

It was getting dark, and Fan knew that she ought to be in doors; but the fascination of this man held her. His voice and manner were those of a gentleman, his appearance of a vagrant. Was he mad or sane? She would ask him in Mr. Harton's words.

'Are you knave or fool?' she said.

'Both, Fan,' he replied; and face and manner grew stern. 'But I am not mad. I am as sane as my enemy, Aspenel. Go.'

He waved his hand towards the gate, and himself vanished into the wood. She stood to look after him. The moon was

careering amid the clouds above; the breeze was moving the trees around; shadows lay thick and heavy everywhere.

'Strange!—what can he mean?' she muttered, when she had seen the last of him, and was turning, slowly, towards the gate.

'What are you doing there, Fan?' came in a severe voice from the road.

It was Tom returning from the Park.

'Gipsying, Mr. Tom,' she said, climbing the gate and running off down the road as fast as she could.

He had the curiosity to examine the spot, and saw other footprints than Fan's on the dew-bespangled turf. Doubtless he drew his conclusions, but they were not the right ones. Fan was home long before him, and had much difficulty in evading Mr. Harton's inquiries concerning her prolonged absence. But he soon reverted to what he called his 'tussle with

the squire,' which enabled Fan to enlarge on her gipsy-class and the camp-meeting.

'You must pay the school-fees, Fan,' he said, laughing. 'I shall make you my scapegoat. But I don't promise to provide the bullseyes and coppers.'

'I wish we were a better race!' sighed Fan.

'You may be made so by Act of Parliament, Fan. We are going to provide education for the world on wheels, and all the vans and travelling villages, and, I take it, the very menageries that roll from place to place, will be taught their duty to their neighbour. I hope the lions will then conscientiously abstain from laying a paw on their keepers, and the tigers won't look hungrily at the outside multitude.'

'Oh! sir, but then the gipsies will be like everybody else, and that would be a pity.'

'The result of education, Fan. Your

friend Clarville thinks we should be all alike, and nothing but preaching will make us resemble one another.'

'He wants to convert us, sir,' said Fan, solemnly.

Here Tom came in and Fan escaped, leaving that worthy to give his father the history of the footprints on the dewy grass. Mr. Harton only laughed and shrugged his shoulders.

The following morning the juvenile gipsies came to school, and when Mr. Aspenel was driving to the station he met some of them *en route*. His suspicions were excited; but then people of suspicious temperament always have their suspicions excited about something or other; and a very unhappy state of mind it is—a state to be religiously shunned. Instead of shunning it, however, he fostered it, and during his short drive to the station he was wondering what mischief the gipsies, and particularly Wandering Will, were brewing. Gerard was

waiting for the train, and he bade him come into his compartment. If Fan was Mr. Harton's scapegoat, Gerard was certainly Mr. Aspenel's, only Fan incurred no expense, whereas poor Gerard did. It never occurred to Mr. Aspenel that he deemed it his duty to pay the difference between his third-class ticket and the first-class which did him the honour of receiving him at the squire's command.

'What are the gipsies up to?' he asked, as soon as they were seated. 'I saw a lot of shameless children near the Board-school.'

'I fancy they are obeying the inspector's orders, and going to school as long as they remain on Hoplands Common,' returned Gerard.

'Then Wandering Will is sure to be about. Is this the result of your snivelling and preaching, Mr. Clarville?'

'I fear not. I wish I could think anything I said bore such good fruit. They

are going to school, because it is convenient to them to remain on the common, and they say everybody except Mr. Harton hunts them off his land.'

'Quite right too. Harton is an ass. They ought to be exterminated root and branch. But for them, my life wouldn't be in danger.'

'But, sir, you have the law in your own hands. If you set the police after that man, they could catch him easily. I saw him attacking you—Mrs. Aspenel's purse was seized by him—we should both recognise him. I knew him when I rescued your son from him. It seems that he should be prosecuted in the interests of justice.'

'I know my own affairs best, Mr. Clarville. I don't want the fellow shut up, but I want him kept at a distance.'

Gerard was silent, and Aspenel's face wore an ominous frown. They were *tête-à-tête*, for early travellers by first-class were

rare from Roselands station. To Gerard's relief, a lady got in at the next station. It was Lady Ascham. She bowed to Mr. Aspenel, whose frown vanished, and whose company manners returned.

'I have been staying at Beechton from Saturday to Monday,' she said. 'I had not a moment to drive over and see Mrs. Aspenel. How is she? She knows how busy I am, and will excuse me. Is that your son? Oh! I beg your pardon, I see he is too old; but I seem to recognise him. May I ask——'

'It is Mr. Clarville, one of my *employés*,' said Aspenel, with a sort of half-introductory, half-patronising manner.

'Mr. Gerard Clarville! I am so glad to meet you,' said Lady Ascham, stretching forward and holding out her hand. 'I knew your mother years ago, and should much like to see her again. But I have no time even for old friends, as Mr. Aspenel

knows. You too will understand, for I hear you are engaged in charitable pursuits. Somebody told Lady Beechton that you were interested in the gipsies, and so am I. We must have them brought under instruction by Act of Parliament, like the riverside population. Will you call on me? Any evening after nine—or perhaps you will come to dinner. Here is my card. We could work together in many ways; but I am quite unconventional.'

'His time is mine, Lady Ascham. It does not benefit young men to take them out of their sphere of labour,' put in Mr. Aspenel, ominously.

'Certainly not, Mr. Aspenel; but naturally his evenings are his own. I may reckon on seeing you, Mr. Clarville?'

Gerard could not help smiling, though he felt that the plot was thickening round him; and that he would have to be cautious if he meant to keep his situation.

'I shall be very glad to call, Lady As-

cham; but my time is pretty well filled up,' he replied, diplomatically. 'It belongs, indeed, to Mr. Aspenel.'

An approving smile passed over the millionaire's face, not unperceived by Lady Ascham, who glanced at Gerard. She wondered if he were a time-server, but his eyes were honest, and his countenance impressed her favourably. He looked, indeed, singularly straightforward. She saw that he might have a difficult part to play.

'I shall expect you some evening. Come when you can manage it,' she said. Then, without waiting Gerard's thanks, she turned to Mr. Aspenel, with, 'How does your daughter Janet get on with my old friends, Monsieur and Madame de Belleville?'

'Very well, I believe,' replied Mr. Aspenel, busying himself with his bag, for he had never inquired.

They reached Charing Cross, where Lady

Ascham got out. She shook hands with both gentlemen, and said, aside to Gerard, 'Don't forget.' They proceeded to London Bridge, whence they went in a cab to the office.

Gerard had scarcely settled to his work when an office-boy summoned him to Mr. Aspenel. He found him seated at his table with an open telegram before him. His face was white, and he was trembling either with passion or terror. He pointed to the telegram, which was from South America, and announced the loss of one of Mr. Aspenel's largest ships. 'Crew saved —cargo sunk,' were the last words, and Gerard involuntarily uttered a cry of thankfulness that, though the freight of gold which the vessel bore was lost, the souls of men were saved. Mr. Aspenel clenched his fist and struck the table, exclaiming,

'You rejoice in my ruin, sir! Your own ruin! Our ruin! A shipload of gold at the

bottom of the sea. Do you know what that means?'

'Yes, sir, but——'

'Come with me to the Stock Exchange; call Mason, Grant, Leslie, Brown—no; I'll cable back at once. If you had gone out to Chili, as I wished, you might have averted this, if——'

Aspenel sank back in his chair, and Gerard witnessed the awful power of gold. He grew livid, and gasped as if he were dying. Gerard unfastened his neckerchief, gave him water, and stood by while he recovered himself, not daring to speak to one who would resent any word he should utter.

The offices were soon all astir with the news, and, although the clerks knew well enough that a loss which might ruin a poorer man would scarcely be felt by Mr. Aspenel, they doubted if they might not be dismissed upon plea of it.

'Hundreds of thousands!' was the mil-

lionaire's cry, as he tore open several other letters and documents that lay before him. One of these contained the ominous words,

'*I must have money,—W. L.*'

With a muttered imprecation he thrust this into a drawer, turned the key, and again summoned Gerard, whom he had dismissed. He asked him if he would go for him to a certain small street leading down to the Thames, and inquire if a Mr. Loveridge had been there lately.

'I can only beg a confidential person to do this, for it is important,' he said, giving him an address.

'Wharf Court. I know it,' said Gerard, whose habit it was to thread all sorts of courts and alleys, and he liked nothing better.

But as he left his patron, and soon found himself engaged in this congenial occupation, he began to wonder whether he was being made a catspaw of. How-

ever, he got involved in a labyrinth, and forgot everything but how best to thread it. Down narrow streets, under arches, through crowded courts, past huge warehouses, into densely-peopled alleys, and finally within a small space surrounded by high, dirty, squalid houses,—and this was Wharf Court.

He knocked at a dingy door, and inquired if Mr. Loveridge were within.

A suspicious-looking man, who eyed him askance through the half-opened door, said,

'No, he isn't; but he will be about ten o'clock to-night.'

'If I should come again, could I see him?' asked Gerard.

'That's more'n I can tell,' was the surly reply.

Gerard reported the result of his visit to Mr. Aspenel, whom he found almost as he had left him, seated grim and deep in thought.

'Would you mind going again at ten o'clock?' asked Mr. Aspenel, in a hoarse, despondent voice.

'Not if I can be of use—and—and—it is a righteous cause,' replied Gerard.

'What do you mean, sir?' shouted Mr. Aspenel, roused from his lethargy.

'That it is a queer place to go to at that hour,' said Gerard; 'and one would almost need the escort of a policeman.'

'You needn't be afraid. I owe the man Loveridge money, and I want to get it safely conveyed to him. You shall be no loser if you will take it to him.'

'I want no gain, sir. But I will do what you ask.'

'Then come to me before I leave. Now I must see about this loss. A hundred thousand pounds!'

Mr. Aspenel covered his face with his hands, and so Gerard left him.

CHAPTER XVIII.

'A RUINED MAN.'

Gerard was in Wharf Court punctually at ten p.m. He had left his watch and chain and his seal ring at his lodging, and had hidden the envelope directed to Mr. Loveridge carefully between his waistcoat and shirt. The court was truly a shady and retired spot, and, unlike many a similar one that he had visited, was strangely quiet. A solitary lamp blinked at him as he entered, and lights dimly burst here and there in the houses, just making the darkness visible. As to the moon, she never looked beyond the roofs and chimneys of Wharf Court, and not a ray of her

heavenly light ever penetrated to its pavement. As he approached the house he had visited in the morning, he saw a man lounging against the wall, smoking his pipe. He could not discern his face even when quite near him, but the voice seemed familiar. He spoke first.

'You come from Mr. Aspenel. I hear he has lost a ship,' he said, and Gerard wondered how the news could have already reached Wharf Court.

'Your name?' asked Gerard.

'Loveridge. If the rich miser has given you a dole, 'tis for the poor spendthrift before you.'

'How am I to know?' asked Gerard.

'By this sign,' replied the man, removing the pipe from his mouth, and taking a dry piece of paper from his pocket. 'I have written my receipt, for I expected you, and the pass-word is "Never again."'

Gerard took the envelope from its hiding-place, and gave it to him. He opened it,

struck a match, and examined the contents.

'This will do for the present, but I must be paid up,' he said. 'I wonder he ventured to send you. He must have either a very good or a very bad opinion of you. You'd better be off as quick as you can, for Wharf Court isn't the safest place in the world about midnight. The police would rather come here in couples than singly.'

'Then why are you here?' asked Gerard, boldly. 'You don't belong to the class that frequents these parts.'

'I'm a nob amongst 'em; but between ourselves, I belong to no particular class. I'm A1 to-day, and the dregs of society to-morrow. There are many like me. Take care you don't come down to our level.'

'Have we ever met before?' asked Gerard.

'I shouldn't wonder if we had, for I've a large acquaintance. More know W. Love-

ridge than W. Loveridge knows. Good-night. My compliments to the miser.'

He opened the house-door and went in, leaving Gerard to make his way back to his lodging.

While this was passing in Wharf Court, a very different scene was enacting at Aspenel Park. Its master did not return till late, and, naturally, dinner had been kept waiting. Mrs. Aspenel and Edith were waiting also, so was the establishment. When a punctual man is two or three hours behind time, it would seem that the whole world is at a standstill.

'Some accident must have happened. We hear of such awful ones!' said trembling Edith.

'Nothing ever happens to Mr. Aspenel but loss of money,' returned Mrs. Aspenel, sarcastically.

Her words were soon verified, for the husband of whom she spoke arrived with

blanched face, and the news that he was a ruined man. He spoke so confidently that even his wife's incredulity was staggered. However, dinner was served immediately, and no further allusion was made to money matters until the servants left the dining-room. Then Mr. Aspenel, usually so secretive, poured out his grievances. While doing so he drank freely. Whether he believed himself ruined or not, his listeners could not discover; but his wife, at least, did not believe it. She knew enough of his wealth to be convinced that the loss of one ship, however valuable, could scarcely lessen its enormous bulk. But, perceiving that he was in an unnatural state of excitement, she bridled her sarcastic tongue, and did her best to calm him.

'I daresay it will all come right,' she said, soothingly.

'That is what you women always say. Come right! Would you like to be

obliged to give up the Park, and to retire to an obscure lodging? Would you call that coming right?'

'Certainly not. But we have not arrived at that pass. I daresay you will easily get over this loss.'

'This loss! It is the forerunner of utter ruin, I tell you, Mrs. Aspenel. You must all set to work to retrench. You must draw in your expenses, reduce the number of servants, keep no company.'

'We can scarcely reduce the latter item,' interrupted Mrs. Aspenel, who could not restrain a mocking laugh. 'Our stock-in-trade consists of the old ladies, the rector, Mr. Tom Harton, and occasionally Gerard Clarville. Seriously, Mr. Aspenel, we must give a dinner-party, if not a ball.'

'A ball! And I have just lost a hundred thousand pounds—a hundred thousand pounds, I say.'

'A large sum, yet only the tenth of a

million. Edith will be eighteen in a few weeks, and must come out.'

'I would rather remain just as I am,' put in Edith, quietly. 'You need give no dinner-party or ball on my account, papa. What was the name of the vessel?'

'The vessel? The *Aspenel*. One of the largest in the world. Only surpassed by the *Great Eastern*. An ironclad warranted to breast every storm. I would have wagered her against all the gold of the Australian mines. And she is lost—sunk—gone to the bottom with a cargo of gold.'

'There are better things than gold, papa,' said Edith, hesitating.

'What?' thundered her father.

'Love. God's love—our love.'

He looked at her keenly for a moment, then rose and left the room.

'What have I said—what have I done?' she asked, appealing first to his vacant chair, then to her step-mother.

'Done us out of a little gaiety, probably. Your father is somewhat excited at this loss, which can only be a drop from the ocean of his riches. I hope it will do him good,' replied Mrs. Aspenel, philosophically.

'I must follow him. He looked almost beside himself.'

'You are mistaken. He knows perfectly well what he is about.'

But Edith went to her father's business-room and listened at the door. She heard the customary rustle of papers, and opening and closing of drawers, and did not venture further. She ran upstairs to Nurse True, and detailed to her what she had already heard from others of the servants. Edith, happily for her, believed in her father's truthfulness, and did not doubt that the ruin he foretold was really imminent.

'You need not be alarmed, lovey,' said Nurse True. 'I daresay Mr. Aspenel is troubled at his loss; but they say he is so

rich that he won't really feel it. Money is a burden grievous to be borne, yet none of us care to lay it down.'

'And what use is it? Oh, Nurse True, what is it doing for any of us?'

'Nothing, my deary. Like seed, its only use is when sown and scattered. You must help to mind Mr. Aspenel of this.'

Edith ran back to wish her step-mother good-night. A kinder feeling had sprung up between them during Janet's lengthened absence, and comparative calm in school-room and nursery had penetrated even to Mr. Aspenel, who agreed with his wife that Janet's holidays were well spent in perfecting her education in Paris.

Mr. Aspenel did not go to bed that night. This was all that was known of him by the outer world. He appeared at breakfast the following morning, but was so absorbed by his loss, and the telegraphic report of it in the *Times*, that he spoke even less than he generally did. He looked

haggard, and his personal appearance was less spruce than usual. He volunteered one question, however, and that was as to whether anything had been heard of the gipsies. His wife answered it.

'Mr. Tom Harton says they are settling down again, and that the children have actually been to school. He thinks the Clarvilles have influenced them, and says his father will not allow them to be molested so long as they keep the law.'

'Old Harton shall pay for this,' muttered Aspenel. 'As to Mrs. Clarville and Gerard, they are absolute fools.'

Edith longed to say a word in their favour, but forbore. She had, since her admission to the breakfast-table, been in the habit of quietly helping her father to collect and tie up his various papers, and to place them in the black bag awaiting them. She was the first person whom he had ever allowed to meddle with his documents, but she managed so unostentati-

ously that he was scarcely conscious of her interference. On this occasion, he permitted her to arrange the whole matter; for, after the brief interlude of the gipsies, he fell into a state of abstraction, and forgot the necessity of having the black bag ready by the time the carriage was announced.

'I think it is all right, papa,' she said, timidly, when he was aroused by, 'Carriage at the door, sir.'

'Thank you, Edith,' he said, and his voice trembled.

The words rang gladly in her ears the whole day; and, incongruous as it may seem, Mrs. Aspenel resented them. He rarely thanked her for anything, but then she seldom volunteered to do anything for him. 'She was tired of trying,' she said to herself, wearily.

And she was weary—weary of her life. Yet she had chosen it: sold herself for gold; that idol which had sunk with the

steamer—her husband's idol! Indeed, her life seemed a burden to her, and but for Bruce, she sometimes thought, she would gladly have 'cast off this mortal coil.' She thought little of the sacredness of life, less of its responsibilities. She was content if her wearisome days wore through without accident, and if their monotony was broken by an occasional guest or morning-caller. She welcomed the advent of Tom Harton, because he was not only a man of education, but good-looking and agreeable. Few days passed that she did not invite him to her presence, after he had finished his mornings with Bruce; and luncheon was the inevitable consequence. Bruce behaved so well at that meal when Harton was there, that his mother and Edith were only too glad to have him kept in order. Thus the tutor grew into the friend. Mrs. Aspenel did not consider that she was throwing temptation in Edith's path, or

imagine that the devotion paid to her might have an ulterior object. As to Mr. Aspenel, he suited him so well that he never complained of his presence.

He chanced to be at the station when Mr. Aspenel reached it—*i.e.*, it was premeditated chance which brought him there. He had a few words to say, which were for Mr. Aspenel's ear alone.

'I have every reason to believe that Wandering Will was in this neighbourhood on Sunday evening,' he began. 'He was tampering with my father's gipsy *protégée*, or I am greatly mistaken. I have been sounding her, but can make nothing of her, except through her inadvertent admissions, which tend to show that it was he to whom she was talking in the copse, when I saw her near the gate by the school house. I have been several times to the encampment since, but have not caught sight of him.'

'Have you heard of my loss? I am a

ruined man!' interrupted Mr. Aspenel, the remembrance of his gold overmastering fear.

'No! What can you mean, Mr. Aspenel?' exclaimed Tom Harton, with genuine alarm.

But up steamed the train, and there was no time for an answer. He saw Mr. Aspenel in, shut the door of his compartment, and turned towards the Park.

'A ruined man! Impossible,' he repeated, as he walked meditatively along the bright country road, not heeding the carpet of red and brown leaves spread by the trees that overhung the Park wall.

He turned into the gates opposite the Cottages, and in doing so was arrested by a voice. It was Miss Short, who was taking her constitutional, and who, seeing him in the distance, hurried after him. She was panting and puffing from the exertion.

'Is it true, Mr. Tom, that Mr. Aspenel has lost everything he possesses, and that

the Park will be sold, and we shall all be ruined together?' she said, pausing at every three words.

'I hope not, Miss Short. But Mr. Aspenel, himself, says so,' replied Tom, hastening on to avoid further questions.

'There must be something in it,' he thought, as he walked up the drive, and then made a *détour* to throw a piece of bread to Edith's swans.

He was in the habit of telling her that he fed them regularly, and, at sight of him, they sailed majestically towards him, their snow-white plumage gleaming beneath the morning sunshine. In his poetical moods —and he was no mean poet—he was wont to write sonnets to Edith and her swans. However, he left them hastily, and went on to the house, gleaming, like the swans, in the sunlight.

He was early, therefore unexpected quite so soon. Bruce had been naughty, and he found Mrs. Aspenel and Edith with

him, endeavouring to soothe him into propriety. Harton's presence effected this. The boy grew in a moment smooth as satin, smothering sobs and drying tears with wonderful self-control.

'How can you manage him?' whispered Mrs. Aspenel, aside.

'By the law of obedience,' he whispered back.

'Have you heard of Mr. Aspenel's loss?' she asked.

'I have seen him,' he replied.

'And what did he say?'

'That he was ruined.'

'How absurd. He has only lost a valuable ship and cargo. Bad enough, I daresay; but not ruin. What with this craze about the gipsies, and constant complaints of losses and crosses, one is driven out of one's senses. You will stay to luncheon, and we can talk it over.'

'Thank you. I shall be only too glad.'

While this was passing, Bruce whispered to Edith,

'If papa is ruined, he can't keep a schoolmaster, and you shall teach me again.'

It was curious how the flames spread. Before Mr. Aspenel returned that evening, it was currently reported in Roselands and the immediate neighbourhood that Aspenel Park was likely to be sold, and people speculated as to whether a new owner might be better than the old.

'Can't be worse,' was the fiat, 'but I'm sorry for the young ladies.'

And so Mr. Aspenel's own words were the key-note to a more than seven-days' gossip.

CHAPTER XIX.

JANET AT LAST.

All the details of home life at Aspenel Park reached Janet at school, in the shape of a diary written by Edith, who rarely retired to rest without detailing the events of the day. This was despatched once a week, and never failed to arrive on Saturday morning. Janet was less regular, because, she said, she had less of mutual interest to communicate; but really because she had less time at her own disposal, and was more carried away by her surroundings. The account of Mr. Aspenel's losses and crosses were written by Edith for Janet's edification, and, though they

were slightly modified the day after our winding up in the last chapter, Janet, when she had read her diary, became quite convinced that ruin was staring her in the face. Being a highly impressionable girl, she rushed with her documents to Madame de Belleville, and burst into a passion of tears.

'Edith says Mr. Aspenel is ruined, madame,' she cried, throwing her arms round this friend, to whom she was entirely devoted.

'Oh! I am sorry; but that cannot be, assuredly,' said madame, patting her on the cheek. 'And, if it is so, you know you desire nothing better than to work for your own bread.'

'But what will Edith and Nurse True do if cast upon the world? and Mrs. Aspenel and Bruce? I cannot work for all.'

'I think that you have not need to distress yourself. I daresay your sister, in

her fear, has exaggerated matters. *On dit* that your father is immensely rich.'

'But if his ships have been wrecked, and his money lost, he must be ruined, as Edith says.'

'And even then, my dear Janet, your desires will be gratified. You will have your wish, and work for your living.'

It was one thing to imagine a life of labour, and another to face it. Youth is sanguine and fancies all things; but when the reality arrives fancy fades. Madame was very fond of Janet, and, by opening her almost maternal arms, received boundless affection in return. Youth is also, or should be, trustful; but Janet had been bred so entirely in the region of uncertainty that she was doubtful of everything save of the love of Edith and Nurse True. Her father was always on the eve of ruin, her step-mother ever mistrustful, and her one prevailing idea was to help herself.

She had confided this to madame, and

during the two years she had been with her she had worked energetically, particularly at painting. Madame could never understand why she remained with her during the holidays, though Janet failed not to assure her that it was the fault of her step-mother, for whom she had a cordial dislike.

'Has Mr. Aspenel paid you, madame,' asked Janet. 'If he has not, you must take me as a pupil-teacher till I am fit for something. I will work for you and monsieur with all my might. Mr. Bellamy thinks I have a talent for painting; monsieur says my French is nearly perfect; Herr Pauer declares I shall never make anything of German; my music is detestable, and I hate everything ancient; and Miss Lawrence is always complaining of my general requirements. What can I do, dear madame?'

'In the first place, let me tell you that I have been regularly paid to the last sou.

There was, indeed, one penny in the last account, and monsieur your father sent me one stamp for it. We will wait till Christmas, which will soon be here, till we commence the pupil-teacher. Now calm yourself, and we will adjourn to the class-room. What will the young ladies think of your red eyes?'

'What matters, dear madame, if we are ruined? Nobody cares whether poor people have red eyes or not. But, while you are rich, it is important to keep your looks. I daresay my nose is also red.'

This fortunate change of conversation turned the current of Janet's thoughts. She looked in the glass, and was so horrified at the effect of eyes and nose that she forgot the impending ruin. She clasped her hands, shrugged her shoulders, and burst out laughing. She was more French than English, to judge from her attitudes; indeed, she loved Paris and the French so dearly that she slightly affected Parisian

manners. The language she had quite mastered. Not that she was affected, in the generally received acceptation of the word, but she was imitative, and so full of buoyant life that the easy brilliancy and lightheartedness of the French pleased her more than the heavy intellect and 'insular dulness' of her own country-people.

'Chère madame, I must wash my eyes and restore my nose to its natural whiteness before I present myself to the gaze of the girls,' she said, and left her friend as unceremoniously as she met her.

'It cannot be as she says,' ejaculated madame; 'if so, what will become of her?'

She had no time to answer her own question, but went off to her work while Janet was in her bed-room vigorously drying her tears, and faintly striving to efface the red.

'It only gets worse and worse,' she murmured, rushing from washstand to glass.

'What have you been doing? Oh!

what a fright!' exclaimed her friend, Lizzie Hazelmere, entering suddenly. 'What is the matter, Janet?'

'Mr. Aspenel, I mean my—my—papa, is ruined,' she replied, covering her face with her towel.

'It would take a great deal to ruin him, I should think,' said Lizzie, philosophically. 'Try a little cold cream or pomatum; I wonder what Maximilien or Wilbraham would say to you now?'

At these magnificent names Janet laughed; for the one was Monsieur and Madame de Belleville's only son, the other Lizzie Hazelmere's eldest brother; and their opinion of Janet, expressed in their mother tongues, was that she was *belle et piquante*, 'handsome and jolly.'

And she certainly was all this, in spite of the roseate glow left by her copious tears; for Janet never did anything by halves. If she laughed, she laughed, so said her mentorias, too immoderately; and if she

cried, the tears came in torrents. Happily, she did not cry often, though she had suffered from occasional storms during her school-life.

'I shall have to support myself; I always knew I should,' she said, despondently.

'But you needn't take all the girls into your confidence,' returned Lizzie. 'I should be much too proud. Whatever happens, you know I am your friend, and, when I leave school at Christmas, you can come and stay with me. But you mustn't think of Wilbraham, for papa says he must have money.'

'What do you mean? I never did think of him. He is the stupidest owl I ever saw.'

The ringing of the school-bell put a stop to this discourse, which would soon have waxed into a dispute, for the friends frequently quarrelled. Both were hot-tempered, and Janet often longed for Edith's quiet voice to soothe her turbulent spirit.

All eyes were turned upon her as she entered the class-room, for, in spite of water and pomatum, her face showed that she had been crying, and the girls wondered 'what sort of row Janet had been getting into.'

But she soon recovered her complexion and her equanimity. Her application was such all that morning that she was commended by Miss Lawrence, usually slow to praise, and ever ready, Janet thought, to blame her. But a weight was on her spirits, and her companions failed to rouse her to her usual hilarity. Lizzie's opinion that it was not necessary to make her possible change of circumstances generally known was an incredible restraint, for she was naturally so open that what she knew and did was patent to all. However, when the day-girls had departed at two o'clock, and the four boarders went to dinner, she no longer disguised the cause of her tears. Her father had lost a ship worth a hundred

thousand pounds, and they might have to leave Aspenel Park, and go nobody knew where. Edith had emphasised 'the obscure lodging,' suggested by her father to Mrs. Aspenel.

'You won't miss the Park, Janet,' remarked Marcella Walsh, 'for you never go near it. For my part I would rather have a poor home that I lived in, than a rich one that I never saw.'

'How rude to say that, Marcella,' exclaimed Lizzie, for conversation was not only general but unrestrained at dinner. 'I don't believe that Mr. Aspenel will be obliged to give up the Park.'

'What does it matter? We shall spend our vacations in Paris all the same,' put in monsieur. 'My friends, reverses of fortune are salutary. I have seen enough of them and so has madame. We should not be here with you, or have made the acquaintance of hospitable England, but for the revolutions of our country and our family.'

'And I am sure the Somersets have seen enough,' said Bella, whose forte was history, and who never tired of poring over the family-tree.

'The Hazelmeres have always held their own,' said Lizzie, with dignity. 'As my father says, an old baronetcy is grander than a new peerage. But, if Mr. Aspenel is really ruined, he will not be made a peer, I suppose.'

'My children, pray finish your dinner. You generally like my *bœuf à la mode* that I prepare myself, because no English cook is capable of doing it; but to-day you scarcely eat. Janet, you must not lose your appetite. You generally set an excellent example.'

Madame's cuisine was her particular forte, and the girls declared that she was prouder of her *bœuf à la mode* and *haricots verts*, and omelettes, and other dainties, than she was of their literary attainments. They certainly did credit to her cookery,

and were as bright and happy a quartette as school-life ever saw.

All that afternoon Janet was pondering over Edith's dolorous diary. Even her painting was irksome to her, and as to the practice, which, at best, she disliked, it became hateful. A walk across the Downs, usually so exhilarating, only depressed her, and her conversation with madame was entirely on the subject of her father's losses. She always walked with madame, and was generally regarded as her daughter. They were known as the handsome French-women, for Janet, to the best of her ability, affected the dress, air, and manners of her friend's countrywomen. She had spent three sets of holidays in Paris, one at Hazelmere. She loved the bright gaiety of Monsieur and Madame de Belleville's friends, and the *petits soins* of their only son, Maximilien, who was studying art in the French capital; while she cared little for what she was pleased to call the

aristocratic monotony of Hazelmere. She laughed at the little romance woven by her friend Lizzie concerning the future baronet, Wilbraham, and herself; and declared that Maximilien was infinitely more interesting. Girls will weave such romances, and Lizzie was essentially romantic. She was to leave school and be 'introduced,' as the phrase is, at Christmas, and the two friends had planned that Janet should spend her holidays at Hazelmere. But now this announcement of Edith's upset their arrangements; for neither knew exactly what the ruin of a millionaire meant. Never had hastily-written diary caused more commotion.

'You see, madame,' said Janet, 'Edith distinctly says ruined; and she entreats me to make the most of my education.'

'I will write to Lady Ascham, and inquire what the reports are,' said madame, struck suddenly with this happy thought.

'How clever of you, dear madame,' ex-

claimed Janet. 'Edith says at the very end of her letter that Cousin Gerard has met Lady Ascham, and she has invited him to call on her; Aunt Clarville told Edith, and Gerard must know all about Mr. Aspenel's affairs.'

'Mr. Aspenel,' as Janet persisted in calling her father, was a sort of myth to the girls and madame, Lizzie alone having learnt, on reliable authority, that he was enormously rich. Madame knew only that her accounts were duly paid to the uttermost farthing, and that she was limited in the pocket-money she was instructed to give her pupil, and restricted as regarded her dress; for the arrangement made by Mr. Aspenel was that she should pay everything and remit the bills to him. No half-year had passed without various questionings respecting certain items in the different accounts, which had given madame so much trouble that she had more than once been on the eve of sending Janet

home; but she was so sincerely attached to the young girl, and herself so dependant on her pupils for support, that she refrained. But she had not an exalted opinion of Mr. Aspenel.

Now she wondered whether his niggardly payments were caused by this impending ruin.

The remainder of that day, and even the following week, was spent in speculations on Janet's future. The day-girls were as much interested as the boarders, and various reports were brought to her from parents and guardians concerning her father's loss. Edith's next diary was more reassuring. In it she said that, although her father made the worst of everything, other people only laughed, and that in the village and at the Cottages they called it 'a scare.' Lady Ascham replied to madame's letter of inquiry that she had heard nothing about it; but that she was hoping for a visit from young Clarville, and would ask him. Thus

matters went on till the approach of Christmas, and Janet was in a fever of anxiety concerning her holidays. The De Bellevilles were not going to Paris, and she could get no answer as to whether she might go to Hazelmere. The effect on her was salutary, for she set to work with a will, and, according to results, made more general progress in two months than she had previously made in two years. On the Saturday before the breaking-up day she received the following letter from Edith :

'DARLING JANET,

'Oh, what joy! You are to come home for the holidays. It is only just settled, and I think it is Mrs. Aspenel's doing. Papa tells me to write to you. I think he is less depressed, and hope he has overrated his losses. Mr. Tom Harton thinks so too. He is a great comfort both to papa and Mrs. Aspenel, but

Bruce detests him. Not another word. All the rest *viva voce*. True dying to see you. Bruce in the extremest excitement. My heart seems bursting with gladness.

'Your loving sister,

'EDITH.'

Janet's excitement was as great as Bruce's, but like him she scarcely knew whether to be glad or sorry. Truly glad she was at the prospect of seeing Edith and Nurse True and Fan and all the rest; much enchanted with the idea of meeting her *beau idéal*, Tom Harton; but strangely depressed when she thought of her former relations with her father, step-mother, and her torment, Bruce.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

London: Printed by Duncan Macdonald, Blenheim House